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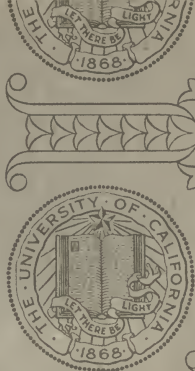
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## HEDGED IN.

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### CHAPTER I.

THICKET STREET: AS IT IS.

"**H**OUSES in streets are the places to live in"? Would Lamb ever have said it if he had spent, as I did, half a day in, and in the region of, No. 19 Thicket Street, South Atlas?

My visit was a recent one, and my story is not; probably, however, the later aspect of the place is a photograph of the earlier. Streets have their moods, habits, laws of character. Once at the bottom of the social stair, they are apt, like men, to stay there. We make over our streets to degradation, like old jackets to the last boy. The big brother always has the new clothes.

The little one, overgrown and under-dressed, remains "the eternal child,"—more simply, (and

perhaps to the Father of the ends of the earth none the less tenderly for the economy,) the "baby of the family."

Thicket Street, at the time of my visit, had about the proportions, to say nothing of other qualities, of a drain-spout. The inelegance of the figure may be pardoned if the reader will bear in mind that I am not writing "a novel of high life."

The alley, long and narrow, sloped over a slimy hill to the water. The sidewalk being a single foot-path only, there was generally a child under a wheel or a hoof; this may have accounted for the number of dwarfs, and gashed, twisted, "unpleasant bodies" which struck the stranger's eye.

The alley, I noticed, was imperfectly guttered, if at all, and, in a storm, became the bed of a miniature torrent; in the best of weather the drainage from the high thoroughfares swept it. Certain old wharves at its mouth, from which the soft, green wood was constantly falling, were laden with—I think it was codfish and whale-oil. One well at the foot of the slope supplied the street. There were two dead trees boxed

in by rails, and a little ruined stucco-work about a few door-ways. ] The houses were of wood, with heavily projecting eaves, and had most of them sunk with the descending grade. This gave them a shame-faced, tipsy air, like that of a man with his hat over his eyes. They had been built by a jerky process of landscape gardening, — in each other's shadow, in each other's light, jutting here, retreating there; having the appearance of being about to *chassez croisé* in a ghastly dance of ruin and filth. The wind blew generally from the wharves. The sun seldom drabbled his golden skirts in the place; even at direct midday, when from very shining weight they fell into the foulness, he submitted to the situation with a sullen pallor like that of faintness. In the sickly light, heaps of babies and garbage became distinct. | In the damp, triangular shadows, formed by the irregular house-fronts, a little cold chickweed crept.

The business spirit of the community expressed itself in a tobacconist's, three concert-saloons, two grog-shops, and a crinoline-mender, — who looked in at the windows of No. 19.

The alley, at the last census, reported be-



tween eighteen and nineteen hundred souls. The accommodations varied from four persons to four families in a room.

No. 19 was a very old house, shabby even amid the shabbiness; it was near the water, and much discolored, I observed, either by the saltiness or the impurity of the harbor mists; the wood was crumbling about the sills of doors and windows, and rank moss notched the roof. Children swarmed on the steps and stairs; an old woman, with a childish leer, sat in a window picking rags; and a young woman, haggard and old, crouched on the pavement, sunning herself like an animal. I asked from the rag-picker the privilege of visiting the second front seaward corner room, and the girl piloted me up the crooked stair.

"Many occupants?"

"Fourteen."

"That's a pity!"

She laughed stupidly.

"Alwers so. It's the biggest tenement in the house; jammed, you bet! Alwers was."

"It must be a very hard thing or a very bad thing."

“Eh?”

“I mean to say that I am sorry for them.”

“Oh!”

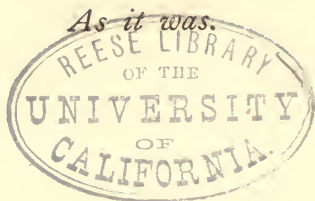
She nodded sullenly, flinging open the door without knock or warning, according to what I took to be the received form of morning calls in No. 19.

The room was full and foul. Babies were numerous and noisy; several women were drunk. The tenement, low and dark, commanded, through dingy and broken windows, a muddy line of harbor, wharves, and a muddy sky. I could see, without, the crinoline-mender at his window, a couple of dance-house signs, and the tobacco-shop. I could see, within, nothing characteristic or familiar. I should except, perhaps, a certain dull stain, which bore a rude resemblance to a spider, over in the eastern corner of the tenement, low upon the wall. A hospitable lady in a red frock, anxious to do the honors of the place, pointed it out.

“*There’s* where a gal murdered her baby; years ago. If ’t had n’t been so long afore our day, I might have accommodated ye with partikkelars.”

This was said with that tender regret with which Mr. White might force himself to drop a broken legend of Shakespeare, or Baring-Gould cement a shattered myth of the Golden Years.

I closed the sunken door with suddenly blinded eyes. I think that I must have offered money to the haggard girl, which she refused. I suspect that something which I said to the rag-picker left her sobbing. I know that I nearly broke my neck over a couple of babies in the door, and that I plodded my way, lame and thoughtful, back through the filth into pure air and sunshine.



## CHAPTER II.

## AS IT WAS.

**T**HICKET STREET, at the time of my story, boasted the foot-path, the foulness, the twisted children, the wharves and whale-oil, the staggering houses and shops for grog, the impure winds and dainty sunlight, the old women turned children, and children old women, as well as about the same generous allowance of inhabitants to the street and to the tenement.

No. 19 offered very nearly its present attractions in respect to room, air, light, privacy, and quiet. The second front seaward corner sustained its reputation for being "jammed, you bet!" retained its dingy windows and muddy view; held, with more tenacity than at the present time, its stained wall and stained legend.

As nearly as I can judge, the only material changes in the vicinity have been the addition

of one concert-saloon, and the substitution of the crinoline-mender for a little guitar-maker, who sang over his work in his window.

That there should be a crowd about the doorways of No. 19 was nothing uncommon, but the crowd collected, chiefly upon the stairs and steps, on a September afternoon somewhat less than thirty years ago, was not altogether of a common kind.

It was composed principally of women, and of old women ; a few young girls hung on its edges, and children — very young children — stood here and there leaning against the walls, listening intently and intelligently.

A woman with rather a clean cap, and her skirts tucked about her bony knees, sat above the rest upon the stairway, her chin in her hands, and her face somewhat grave. It was as rugged as a face could be without being positively bad, but it was not bad. She had a sharp mouth (all the women in Thicket Street had sharp mouths), but it was slightly softened ; and keen eyes, but they were slightly dim. She had evidently a story to tell, and had told it, and was not loath to tell it again.

Conversation was brisk, and ran like this : —

“She said so?”

“Yes.”

“She ’s always sayin’ oncommon things, — Nix.”

“What did you tell her, Lize?”

“I told her if she wanted to be let alon’, let alon’ she should be.”

The woman in the clean cap said this decidedly.

“It ’s a poor time to be givin’ of herself airs, in my opinion ; ’t ain’t more’n common politeness to the neighbors to give ’em a sight of the baby.”

“I tell you what it is, Moll Manners!” — Lize shook her head sternly, and jerked her sharp knees against the wall, as if to bar the stairway, — “I ’ll be obleeged to *you* if you ’ll keep away from Nixy Trent. Hear, do ye?”

Moll Manners laughed a little, with a certain change of color, which, years ago, might have been a blush. She had bright eyes, and they snapped. Lize punched her other knee into the wall, breaking away the cracked plaster by the emphasis of her touch, and rambled on : —

“She ’s too good a gal to be spoiled in a hurry, poor creetur ! sobbin’ night an’ day this three months gone, and never a mother in the world to do for her this day. She ’s out of her head off and on ; talks of prison and p’lice-folks ; keeps a pleadin’ and a beggin’ of Jēb Smith to take her back into the saloon. Every time the young un cries, — it ’s an ugly, squealy little thing as ever drew breath in *this* world, — down goes she with her head under the clothes — all in a heap — to shut out the noise, likes I make it. She takes it uncommon hard. In the course of my experience,” — Lize attempted to lower her voice sentimentiously ; the effect of the effort was a bass grumble, — “*in* the course of my experience, I never see a gal take it so *uncommon* hard. There ’s gals an’ gals, but then you know there ’s a mother or suthin’, leastways an aunt, or less. There was Ann Peters, now ! I was nigh ready to forgive old Mis’ Peters beatin’ of Boss to death, for the way she up an’ stood by Ann, an’ she nothin’ but a fust cousin ! It spoke well for the family. Nix here hain’t so much as a cat ’at belongs to her name, — an’ not turned sixteen !”



Lize spoke loudly, — she was never known to speak otherwise, do the best she might, — and apparently the little guitar-maker across the way heard what she was saying, — in part, at least, — for his song stopped abruptly, — he had been singing something in French about “*L’amour, l’amour,*” — and he turned his back to No. 19 with an angry jerk. He wished that the women would let the girl alone. He was rather fond of Nixy. It vexed him to hear her chattered about. He twanged a cracked string discordantly, while they whispered and nodded about Lize and Moll. Moll, being rather quick, noticed this, and took the trouble to laugh at him.

“What ’ll become of the baby, Lize?”

“The Lord knows!”

“There’s ways of gettin’ rid o’t, — Nix is no fool.”

“Nix is no brute!” retorted Lize, crossly. She pulled her knees out from the hole they had worked in the wall, and stretched herself powerfully, gathering up her skirts meanwhile, to mount the dirty stairs. Lize used to get laughed at in No. 19 for being “fine.”

“There’s the young un again! That child

will cry itself to death yet, and good riddance ! It worrits her into them fever spells I was tellin' of. There 'll be the mischief to pay if we can't keep her more peaceful-like — and a doctor too !” (“ Yes, yes !” calling up the stairs. “ Never mind, Nix ! I 'll be back.”) “ Well, well ! It 's a sorry piece of business, make the best ye will o't. Good lack be praised, *I* never brought a woman-child into the world !”

A little wailing cry from the second front seaward corner floated down after Lize, and Lize, with powerful steps, tramped up after it.

Moll Manners shrugged her shoulders. The women, with whispers, scattered slowly. The little guitar-maker struck up a tune, and sang : —

“ Down at the bottom of the hill,  
It 's lonely — lonely !  
O, the wind is sharp and chill  
At the bottom of the hill,  
And it 's lonely — lonely ! ”

I presume Nix, in her corner bed, close under the stained wall, had caught the tune (she knew most of the guitar-maker's tunes), if not the words, for she was sobbing when Lize came up.

She was a young thing, as Lize had said, “ not

turned sixteen," with the expression even of a much younger child ; in fact, there were children in the group gossiping about her down stairs with faces older than hers. She might, in an innocent, happy time, have been pretty, very pretty. Now, worn with suffering and shame, she was ghastly.

She was comparatively alone ; that is to say, there were but three people in the room besides herself and her child, — a child sick with measles, a woman drunk, and a woman washing ; the room was filled with unclean steam.

Her bed — I apply the term out of courtesy to the mass of rags and straw upon which she lay with her two-days baby — being, as I said, in the corner, Lize had contrived to shield it a little by a ragged calico curtain ; it was one of her own dresses which had been waiting for patching, — that curtain ; Nixy had been too sick to find this out, which was as well, for Lize had not many dresses, and she knew it. There was brown paper pinned across the lower half of the window too, — Lize's work ; it was old, soiled, and cracked in the folds ; strips of pale sunlight, narrow as a knitting-needle, pierced it, and Nixy,

lying quite still now for some time past, had been watching it with confused interest. There were clothes flapping and drying out on a neighbor's roof, and the strips of light quivered and shot about in consequence.

Sometimes they struck Nixy in the eyes, and hurt her. Sometimes they struck the baby, and she wished that they would hurt him; he cried as if they did, and she was glad of it. The baby was so dreadful to her! Sometimes she took the golden needles into her hands, and knit with them—fast; socks for the child, shawls for him, shrouds for him,—always for him, and always fast. Sometimes the needles turned into sharp fingers, and pointed at the red stain upon the wall, when the spider appeared to move—the spot seemed more like a spider to Nixy than it did to me—and crawl over the baby, and crawl over her.

“Hm—m—m.” Lize, coming in, kneeled, with her finger on the girl's pulse, and her chin set in thought.

“This won't do; this won't do! There 'll have to be somebody that knows more nor me to take you in hand, Nix. Hush! Ye've cried

enough. Doctor won't harm ye u'less it was for his interest and adwantage, — which 't ain't likely. There ! Stop your noise !”

For Lize was rough sometimes, and was, to tell the truth, at the end of her professional wits with the girl.

“I 'd rather not ! I 'd rather not have a doctor !” said Nixy, weakly. “When I get well I 'll earn enough to pay *you*, Lize, if you 'll be bothered to take care of me alone, you know. I 'll be able to walk before you know it. I could almost walk to-day, if I tried. *He* 'd send me to jail, ef you get *him* !”

“I don't want yer money !” growled Lize, “and 't would n't be jails ; 't would n't be worse nor 'sylums, where the Lord knows ye mought be best off. It 's a way he has, — yes ; but it mought be a worse way. He 's not a bad man, — Burtis. Little pay and many patients he 's got out of Thicket Street in my time. Hush now ! or ye 'll set the young un off again. Take yer drops and yer naps afore dark and the men-folks comin'.”

Nixy hushed, but, much as she dreaded the time and the noise of the “men-folks comin',” she could not sleep. She shut her eyes to please

the old nurse, and, in coherent and incoherent snatches, thought.

Nixy had never done much thinking in the course of her life.

I knew once a brave, busy, generous girl, who, years after the bitterest affliction of her life, used to say, "Some time, I think, I shall feel better if I can make time to cry. I've never had room to cry."

Nixy, I believe, had never had room to think.

She did not remember her childhood distinctly, the very poor are not apt to, perhaps ; present necessities are too stern to admit of past fancies, — and childhood resolves itself into a fancy.

Nixy was nobody's child ; she could remember as much as that.

Fragments of things came to her as she lay there with her baby on her arm that night ; snatches of songs she used to sing in the streets, rapping out the tune with her cold little knuckles on a cracked tambourine for a man with an American face and Italian name, — her uncle, I believe, she was taught to call him ; a dim memory of the woman to whom he sold her, — she kept boarders ; of another woman who

“adopted” her,—that was the one who got drunk every Tuesday, and beat her with the bottle Wednesday mornings; of the city missionary in a green veil, who picked her up selling matches at a corner one winter day, and lodged her in an orphan-asylum; of ten months of little blue-checked orphans and dog’s-eared spelling-books (the best ten months of Nixy’s life, to be sure, if she had only been “educated” enough to know it); of her running away one dark night because she could not do a sum in fractions; of how sorry she had been for it in spots; of the days after that when she wandered about with the Thicket Street babies, hunting for apple-cores in the mud,—the hungriest days of her life those were; of persuading Jeb Smith to try her in his dining-saloon at the corner at last,—of the life in No. 19,—of the cold horror of the last few months.

So now it was either all over or all begun; she wondered confusedly which. At any rate, here everything had stopped.

What next?

“Your hand, if you please; that’s right. I want the pulse.”



Nixy turned with a start that woke and frightened the child. The doctor sat on the floor beside her, with his watch in his hand.

"I don't want you," said Nixy.

"I am sorry to intrude upon you against your wish ; but you need me, as I think you will find."

The physician spoke with careful courtesy. A close observer might have thought him to be addressing an up-town matron. It was a "way" Dr. Dyke Burtis had ; people had often remarked it of him.

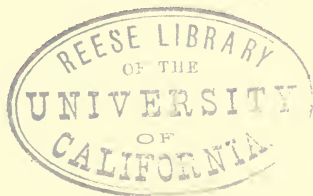
Nixy felt it, but it failed to put her at her ease ; something in it reminded her of the missionary in the green veil ; gave her visions of blue checks and school-bells and "hours" for things ; startled her slumbering dread of "jails and 'sylums" ; indeed, she had an indistinct impression that it was this very man who took Ann Peters to a Magdalens' Home after old Mis' Peters hung herself. And if ever anybody had been a scarecrow to Nixy, it was Ann Peters. So, because she was frightened, she was sullen.

But the physician said nothing of jails, and did not so much as hint at 'sylums. He dealt

with her gently, and left her soon, — for which Nixy, in spite of her wretched, terrified self, approved of him.

She had seen more than she appeared to through her half-closed, heavy eyelids ; had watched the gentleman's face ; had felt it — for even people like Nixy feel such things — to *be* a gentleman's face ; and had concluded that she should know it if she were to see it again.

It was a face of perhaps thirty-five years' moulding, with nothing noticeable about it except a very irregular, full forehead, and a streak of gray in the middle of a black beard.



## CHAPTER III.

## THE SECOND FRONT SEAWARD CORNER.

“**A** CIVIL-SPOKE man,” said Lize, cuddling the baby that night, “and no fool. I take it ye ’re better for his stuff a’ready. Hey, Nix?”

“Very like,” said Nix, absently; she had forgotten Lize and the doctor; she was dropping miserable tears on the pillow, glad of a chance to cry without wetting the baby. The room was full now, and very noisy. She and Lize were alone behind the calico curtain. The window was raised beyond the brown-paper shades, to give the girl a breath of something a tone fresher than the double allowance of gin and tobacco consequent on the return of “the men-folks.” The guitar-maker in his window was twanging a hymn; on practice, not on principle; it meant nothing to him, — he was French; he had picked it up by the way from a street-preacher. It began like this, as Nixy made it out: —

“Depths of mercy! —”

Then she lost it in a little tuning and a little swearing ; in the interval she stopped crying to listen, glad enough of a change of ideas ; for she was young and easily diverted.

“Depths of mercy ! —”

Something was the matter with the upper E ; the next time he had it. M: Jacques was critical of himself always : —

“Depths of mercy ! can there be  
Mercy still in store for me ?”

“I wonder,” said Nix, suddenly, trying to sit up in bed.

“Wonder ef it ’ll take after you ?” Lize was holding the baby up in a streak of light that fell through the calico curtain. “Yes. Got them big eyes o’ yourn all over agin, — worse for ye, mebbe !”

“I wonder what Jacques’s about, — what it means, you know. O, you don’t know. Well !”

She fell back wearily upon the straw.

“. . . . can there be ? — can there be ?”

sang Monsieur Jacques.

Nixy, thinking it over, presently opened her eyes.

"I know. It means, if there 's any way out — with *that*."

She pointed at the baby with that expression, partly of loathing, partly of fear, which always came upon her face at the sight of it.

"Bless my soul ! she 's crazed yet. Out of *what* ?"

Lize was losing patience.

"I don't know," said Nixy, sadly. "Never mind !"

She did know ; she had a jumble of ideas about "depths," and the "bottom of the hill," and its being "lonely — lonely," and that Jeb Smith might not want the child in the saloon ; but they were not distinct enough to make Lize understand.

"I s'pose *you* could n't tell me what — to do — when I get out ?" she asked of her by and by, very slowly.

"Hold your tongue !" said Lize. "Time 's in no hurry."

If time was in no hurry, Nixy was. It was so hard lying there in that room ! People were in and out, and stared at her ; the doctor with the streaked beard came and went, and prescribed for her. Lize, off and on, took care of her. Moll

Manners, down stairs, gossiped about her. The guitar-maker, in his window, sang at her ; generally about the "hill," or the "depths" ; sometimes of "L'amour, l'amour" ; in dull weather, and there was much dull weather during poor Nixy's convalescence, he practised dirges.

If Nixy had been an up-street wife, she might have been allowed the privilege of being "depressed" under the circumstances, I suppose. So Dr. Burtis thought, remembering certain of his happier patients ; one in particular, an out-of-town lady, — Myrtle was the name, by the way, though that is little to the point, — from whose pink and perfumed and dolorous chamber he used to come direct to No. 19.

Nixy, being in Thicket Street, and being only Nixy, "had the dumps," — so Moll said.

"She 's cried long enough," observed Moll. (Poor Moll !) "A week would have answered. The world won't stop for her."

"The child ain't to blame, Nixy Trent !" said Lize, sternly ; once when, after six hours of rain and the Dead March from Saul, Nixy desperately flung the wailing infant off her arm, and buried her set face in the straw. "The child ain't at

fault, I tell ye. Don't ye care nothin' for yer own flesh and blood? helpless—innocent—

“No,” interrupted Nix; she thought that Lize was growing sentimental, which perhaps she was. Lize had never expended much of her affection on her own honest-born babies at the advanced age of two weeks.

“The Lord love it, if its mother won't!”

She spoke heartily that time, and Nixy's head—it was such a child's head!—came out of the straw.

“Mother? I wish *I* had a mother. To go to now, you know, Lize. To take me in, mebbe, and help bear what folks say, and all that. S'pose she 'd be ready and willin'? I wonder if she 'd kiss me!” Lize subsided.

“S'pose your boy come now, Lize,—not the dead one, but t' other one as shot the fellar and ran away, you know,—would *you* take him in, and help him bear what folks said?”

“Tim's no fool either,” said Lize, gruffly, after a silence; “he knows.”

She gathered Nixy's baby up into her brown warm neck, and kissed it. Nixy watched her thoughtfully, but Nixy did not want to kiss it.



The poor child would have hated the baby if she had known exactly how.

She used to dream, in her feverish nights, of being at the bottom of Jacques's "hill," and all the foot-paths up were narrow — very ; and in every path upon which she set her foot that baby lay. This dream pursued her till her child was over two weeks old.

"What is to become of that poor girl?" The gray-bearded doctor asked this of Lize one dark night, in a whisper ; and Lize, in a whisper, answered : —

"Heaven knows ! For *she* don't. I've come to the end of my rope. Folks must live if they *are* sorry for folks. I'm promised up to Jeb's day after to-morrow."

When they came to Nixy, they found her sitting up straight in bed, her mouth set and sulky.

The physician saw that he had been overheard.

"It's no use, I tell you !" began Nixy, promptly.

"What is of no use ?"

"I won't go, I won't go !"

"Go where ?"

"You know you'd send me to the 'sylum if

you could!" said Nixy, defiantly. "You know it as well as I do! I tell you it's no use!"

"What *will* you do, Nixy?"

"I — don't know."

Nixy's eyes turned black and frightened, wandered from the doctor to the window, to the stained wall, to Lize, like the eyes of a caged creature.

"I will make everything easy and pleasant for you," said Dr. Burtis, gently. He hated to terrify the girl; he wished he knew of a woman who could do this business for him; he felt very much as if he were pinching butterflies. "They will help you to be good at the Home. They are very kind. After a while they will find the best way for you to —" he hesitated, gravely ending — "to begin life over again." ("She's almost as much of a child as her baby!" — under his breath to Lize or himself, — or the Lord perhaps; for the Lord generally heard something of Dyke Burtis's patients.)

He might as well have talked to the tides, — I do not mean the Lord now, but Nixy.

"I know all about your 'sylums," persisted the girl. "I've been there; afore I went to Jeb's. I

ain't going from one prison to another so easy. Folks was well enough, — but you don't catch me agin!" In spite of herself, Nixy sobbed. Dr. Dyke Burtis coughed uneasily, and took up his hat; he could eradicate tumors with more composure than he could command against a crying girl, — and such a helpless, miserable girl!

"Think of it till to-morrow," he begged her, with gentle deference, — "think of it till to-morrow, and I will see you again."

"Will you, though?" thought poor Nixy. "It takes two to make *that* bargain." She turned her face to the wall to think. Lize came up soon to go to bed; but Nixy, still with her face to the wall, lay thinking, and Lize rolled heavily upon the straw beside her without speaking. The thing of which Nixy was thinking was that stain upon the wall. She was wondering who the girl was that lay just here, where she was lying, years ago; what she was like; if *she* had a mother to help her bear what folks said, and all that; if she did, why she knocked out the baby's brains; if it was easy to do, — knocking out a baby's brains; she felt sorry for the girl; it did not occur to her for some minutes to be sorry for the baby.

Then she thought how much more likely Jeb would be to take her back if she went alone. She meant to go to Jeb's to-night, which suggested the idea.

Then she fell to speculating a little, idly, on the ease with which she could squeeze the baby up against the wall ; it would not be difficult to squeeze the breath out of it altogether.

This did not strike her as a thoroughly pleasant thing to do ; but the longer she looked at the stained wall, the more familiar the idea seemed to grow to her, as a thing which might be done, — as one would take a pill, for instance, to cure a headache. She could have sworn to it, as she looked, that the red spider was weaving a red web all about her and about the child. She wanted to waken Lize and ask her. Because, as the web tightened, it drew her away from Lize, and nearer the child, and nearer the red-dened wall. And as the web narrowed, it seemed to her rather imperative than otherwise to squeeze the baby, just to see how it would feel.

If she was dreaming, she must have roused suddenly, for Lize, half awake, put her rough hand over on the girl's hair, in a motherly and protecting though very sleepy way.

“Lie still, Nix, and let alon’ lookin’ after the murder-stain ; it ’ll give ye dreams.”

The murder-stain? That struck Nixy as a new idea.

“I ’m not *that*,” she said aloud. “I was only thinking — well!” She drew nearer to Lize, and took the child upon her arm. She felt herself grow suddenly cold all over, but her head was hot and clear.

“Lize!”

Lize turned sleepily.

“You’ve been good to me. I sha’ n’t forget yer noways.”

“Go to sleep, — go to sleep!” said Lize, unromantically enough.

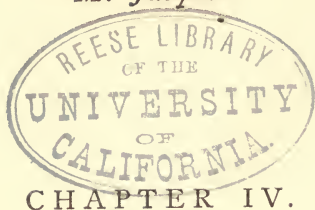
“And, Lize, look here! I ’ll try to like it; I ’ll try to like the baby, because you took it all up in your neck and kissed it, just like — just like I wished I had a mother to take me up and kiss me.”

The last words were spoken to herself, for Lize was sound asleep.

So were half the men and women in the room. It was early ; but they were all hard workers or hard drinkers in No. 19, and they slept both soon and soundly.

Nixy lay still for a little time, and then, with great care and little stir, crawled with the baby over Lize's feet, and sat down to rest upon the floor. She was faint, at first, with the effort, but after a while found herself able to hunt for and crawl into her clothes, that lay in a heap at the foot of the miserable bed.

Some of the doctor's medicine was left in a mug upon the floor ; she drained it eagerly. Her shawl and straw hat were on a nail within reach. These she put on, sitting still for a while to rest. She had a dull feeling of relief that Lize slept so soundly. This was drowned, however, by an acute consciousness that the baby was heavy, and that it was not as easy as it used to be to walk across the room.



M. JACQUES.

NOS. 19 and 21 boasted between them an outside stairway ; this was a luxury in Thicket Street, so great as to affect the rents.

This stairway scaled the room where Nixy lay ; a door between the eastern windows opened upon it ; the hinges were broken and creaked ; a couple of beds and several sleepers lay between her and it ; it so happened, however, that another of those ragged curtains, such as Lize had given her, hung between Nixy, sleepers, and door, and the waking occupants of the room ; these last were economizing the day's earnings, thievings, or beggings by means of dice and a little rum, which accounted for the privacy.

Nixy, after some thought and rest, concluded to aim for the eastern door. If detected in her attempt, she had no fears of interruption from any one but Lize ; the rest would give themselves

no trouble about her ; but it would take little trouble to waken Lize.

The child stirred as she started, but she hushed it, — more softly, it must be owned, than she had ever hushed him before, — and Lize called her, but it was in a dream.

She made her way with little difficulty to the creaking door, turned for a moment to look in at the gamblers, the sleepers, the stained wall, the curtain behind which old Lize was lying, with a dull pain, like that of homesickness, for it was the only home she knew.

When she had closed the door and sat down upon the stairs outside, it struck her that she had never understood before that she lived in a world ; for all in a moment it had grown so large !

The stairs were damp, and she shivered with chill and weakness. Light in the windows of 21 fell, across the low-roofed passage-way that separated the two houses, upon her ; it would have been difficult to tell whether she looked most haggard or most frightened.

Ann Peters used to live in 21. She thought about Ann as she sat there, with a notion of warming her hands in the light from the win-



dows ; wondered how she liked it at the 'sylum ; wondered what the doctor with the streaked beard would say to-morrow, when Lize told him that she had gone.

This reminded her that she must be in haste, which, in the confusion consequent on coming, in her weak condition, from the close room to the cold air, she had for the moment forgotten.

She got up and felt her way down the stairs ; they were very slippery, and it was a slow process. She dreaded falling, not so much because of herself as because of the child, for Lize would hear it cry. The effort to make the descent successfully excited her a little, and she crossed the street with considerable ease.

The guitar-maker's window was shut. What he was singing, or if he were singing, Nixy could not make out. She passed his door, and on up to the corner and Jeb's.

Jeb was serving late suppers yet. The door was open ; the smell of coffee and baked beans puffed out ; the lights were bright ; the ragged waiter-girls were flaunting to and fro ; a new one in a yellow dress had Nixy's tables. Jeb himself

stood behind the cigar-counter, casting accounts on his thumb-nail.

Nixy folded her shawl closely, so that Jeb could not see the child, and ventured in. The girls saw her before Jeb did, and laughed. Nixy stood still and trembled with sudden shame. It had not occurred to her before that anybody could laugh at a thing so miserable as she felt herself to be. She hated the girls for it; she did not believe that Jeb would laugh.

Jeb did not; I must say that for him. When he saw her, looking over his thumb-nail at last, he swore at her good-naturedly, which was far more Christian.

But when Nixy begged him to take her back he shook his head.

“Can’t do it! What do them bills say?” — he pointed to the door, where his bills of fare fluttered in the dark, like the ghosts of good dinners, Nixy thought, — “‘*Re-spectable first-class dining-saloon for ladies and gentlemen of the cheapest kind. Meals at all hours aristocratic!*’ That ’s what it says. Business is business! Won’t do. Gave your place to that yellow gal next day.”

"But I must go somewhere!" pleaded Nixy. "I must have things to eat, you know, and clothes — and things!"

She had really expected Jeb to take her; her voice broke into a sharp cry.

"Sorry for 't," said Jeb; "but it's no use. Fact is, Mis' Smith would n't hear on it; an' it would n't do for me to be crossin' of her wishes and desires decided, ye see. Mis' Smith's a par-tikkelar woman when her mind is sot. Ye'd better go, Nix, afore the customers sees you."

Nixy went slowly out, with all the little ghosts of dead dinners fluttering about her head, and the girl in yellow curiously peering under her shawl. She seemed to be somewhat bewildered; walked up and down in a vague way, past the smaller concert-saloon and the tobacconist's, finally sat down stupidly on the pavement, just where she happened to be when the idea struck her.

"Can there be? — can there be?"

Mercy still —

At the bottom of the hill — "

The little guitar-maker seemed to be practising in her very ears; she had not known before that she was under his windows.

“ Can there be —

Mercy still ?

— C’est l’amour, l’amour, l’amour,

Que fait le monde à la ronde !

— At the bottom of the hill — ”

“ Jacques ’s drunk,” said somebody, with a laugh, at Nixy’s side. Nixy knew better ; Jacques never got drunk before Thanksgiving. She moved indignantly away from Moll, — for it was Moll, — and laid her hand upon the guitar-maker’s door.

“ He ’s only practising,” she said, absently. She was wishing that Moll would go away. As she did not, Nixy pushed open the guitar-shop door, and shut it closely behind her. M. Jacques, in the middle of his favorite dirge, started and stared as she came into the light from his low oil lamp.

M. Jacques was a little man, with a well-brushed red wig, worn in spots on top, very black boots, patched, and cleansed pink gloves ; the gloves he drew on, as he always did when not at work, and he had laid aside his instrument at sight of Nixy.

M. Jacques believed in three things, — Rous-

seau, woman, and his guitar. His faith, like his fancy, was a *pot-pourri*; the same inventive stroke which welded odd meanings into his splintered songs wrought from his ragged creed a species of chrysalis Christianity, of that kind which a man himself is the last to detect in himself.

Nixy liked M. Jacques, partly because he was an old man and a pure one, partly because, when he sang to her, she forgot that she lived in Thicket Street. M. Jacques liked Nixy because she sat still when he played, because she was pretty, and because he was sorry for her. He was fond of testing a new song on her, when she dropped in of an evening, — struck lights through her as if she had been a transparency. When she had gone, he prayed “the Soul of Nature,” or “the Spirit of the Whole,” to shield the girl; though, to be sure, he called it philosophizing, not prayer.

“I’ve come to say good by,” said Nixy, “and —” In the middle of her sentence the baby cried.

“Let me see it,” said the old man, gravely.

Nixy unfolded the shawl, and laid the child across the guitar-maker’s patched knees. M.

Jacques had spoken so gently that her startled color fled quietly away. It was the first time that she had touched the little thing without a sense of shame and horror which choked her.

“Jeb would n’t take me back,” she explained, “and so we ’re going away, — me and it, you know.”

“Ma foi ! Going where ?”

Jacques gave the child back to her, and wiped his eyes.

“I — don’t know.” She gave the old answer, with the old frightened look. “There must be somewheres to go to. There must be folks that ’ud take us in. I don’t think I ’m so very bad, Jacques. There must be somewheres.”

She turned to go, wrapping the baby up in her shawl again, for it was growing late, and it was according to her plan to be beyond the reach of the streaked doctor and the ’sylum, with “hours for things,” to-morrow.

The little Frenchman, coughing acutely, detained her, while he hunted for a moment in the drawer behind his counter. This was rather to command himself than to find money, for all that he had was in his pocket. All that was in his

pocket he offered her, with something of the hesitation you might exhibit in transacting money affairs in a drawing-room. But Nixy took it simply enough.

"If one were guitar-maker to the Empereur, one could double it—double it!" said M. Jacques, meditating. "That is the consequence of one countree without l'Empereur: there are no guitars. And if Dahlia —"

"I know," said Nixy. She had heard so often about l'Empereur and the dead Dahlia — Jacques's young wife, who died, with Jacques's young guitar business, in the Rue Richelieu — she knew it quite by heart.

"If it were that Dahlia were but here!" sighed M. Jacques, "you would not find the need to go from me in this dark — Ugh!" as Nixy opened the door, "it is très dark! Well, well! She was one femme très blanche; she could well afford to cry over a little girl like you."

Nixy, as she wrung his pink kid glove, was crying hard enough over herself. The little warm shop, and the guitar, and the songs, and the faint memory of the "femme blanche,"

seemed so safe ! The dark, — it was very dark as she first stepped outside, — and the noise of the rising wind, sweeping up from the harbor, gave her a certain terror of herself, which was worse than the terror of another.

“ I don’t suppose I *do* know very much ! ” said Nixy, stopping short, between the guitar-shop and No. 19, to take a last look at their lighted windows. An artist should have met this child just then and there.

“ That ’s the truth ! ”

Nixy did not know that she had spoken aloud, till she heard Moll Manners’s sharp laugh. She was vexed at meeting Moll again, but tried not to show it ; she had the feeling that she had no right to be vexed even with Moll, — a new feeling, which gave her the discomfort of an unquiet dream.

Moll was standing in one of those sharp, triangular shadows in which Thicket Street abounded ; and it seemed to Nixy, as she looked at her, that all the drunken houses, with their roofs tipped over their eyes, were dancing dizzily about her.

“ You ’re in a hurry,” said Moll, as Nixy moved uneasily to pass on.



"Yes," said Nixy.

"What's up now?"

"I — don't know."

"Worse for ye! That's alwers the way. Nobody knows. I did n't know."

Nixy made no answer, and the two girls stood for a moment in silence, looking at each other across the sharp shadow, into which Moll had stepped. Nixy, in the pause, noticed a little scraggly, dank chickweed upon the wall beside her, and upon the pavement, where Moll had crushed it with her foot. In the pause, too, the opposite concert-saloon flung out a burst of ugly mirth, and the lights flashed into Nixy's young eyes.

"Chance for ye there, mebbe," suggested Moll, with what she meant for real good-nature. Nixy had thought of that; there had been good girls known in concert-halls; one could be what one liked; it was easy work and comfortable pay; it looked warm behind the lights, and she was growing much chilled from standing in the damp street.

"But I want to *stay* honest. There must be somewheres else!" This she said with perplexed alarm in her voice, and stepped away

from Moll's sharp shadow, and down the street, repeating what she had said to Jacques among the guitars:—

“There must be somewheres! There must be folks! There's honest things to do, and I'll hunt till I find 'em!”

“Ye'll hunt till ye die,” called Moll from her shadow. “Might as well go to the devil one time as another time,—for go ye must!”

Nixy shuddered. With sudden strength she sprang away from Moll, from the shadow, from the noise of the concert-hall; the sunken houses reeled about her; the lights of No. 19 twinkled away; the guitar-shop flitted out of sight; she struck into tangled wharves and salt air suddenly, and stopping, out of breath, sat down to collect her strength.

Very faintly she could hear Monsieur Jacques's guitar:—

“Down at the bottom of the hill,  
It's lonely — lonely!  
O, the wind is sharp and chill  
At the bottom of the hill,  
And it's lonely — lonely!”

In a few moments, for she was afraid to stay

where she was, she weakly threaded her way out from among the oil-barrels and codfish, from among the wharves and shipping, through streets the like of Thicket Street, and tenements the counterpart of No. 19, with her face set towards the open country, and her heart in the ways of those to whom it is promised that "they shall see God."

## CHAPTER V.

MRS. ZERVIAH MYRTLE.

NIXY, so far from thinking of God, was crying impatiently because the baby was heavy, and because every time that she sat down to rest she seemed to hear Monsieur Jacques, and the guitar, and the sorrowful song about the hill.

She found herself obliged to rest very often ; between whiles she walked fast, now thinking that she must put distance between herself and the doctor's 'sylum ; now, between herself and Moll.

It was not until nearly twelve o'clock that it occurred to her that she had nowhere to spend the night, and that the lights in the houses were all out.

She must have walked far when she made this discovery, — very far for one in her feeble condition.

The city burned dimly behind her, like the embers of a huge bonfire ; the cultivated suburban country lay smooth and dark before her ; shades of houses gathered about her ; shades of trees, parks, walls, finished and elegant things, filed past her with a shadowy hauteur. She crept on by them, chilled and frightened, wondering whether nobody lived in small houses without the city, and how many tenements there might be in such a place as that square house with the curiously gabled roof. She ventured as far as the pebbled drive that led to it, and looked up and around timidly for encouragement ; this she found, or thought she found, in a bar of mellow light which fell quivering upon the lawn from a bay-window at the side of the house ; the sash was raised, and a warmly tinted curtain, stirred by the wind, floated in and out. As she stood looking up, very still there, under the trimmed trees, in her shabby shawl, a sharp gust caught in the bright damask that folded the sick-room (she had concluded that it was a sick-room) from her sight, and there flashed before her a kaleidoscope of soft lights, tints, glasses, cushions, curtains, and there was wafted out to her a child's cry. This fright-

ened her, and she crept softly away ; she began to wish that she had left her child at No. 19, and to wonder, Would anybody take her in with the child ? Then, remembering her promise to Lize, she “ tried to like it,” but succeeded only in patting the little thing with a desperate gentleness that woke and terrified it.

She plodded on for a while, the child crying across her arm, and her weak limbs sinking, in hopes of finding another lighted window ; but there were no more. Exhausted and desperate, she crawled, at length, under the shadow of a wooden gate, thinking that she would rest there, or die there, as chance might be, and thinking (as all young people think when they are tired) that she cared little which.

The wooden gate belonged to an omnibus station ; Nixy discovered this presently, and as it was very cold where she lay, and as, on the whole, she might die just as well at another time, she conceived the idea of spending the night in an omnibus. So she pushed the baby under the gate, which was locked ; and, being so slight and small, contrived to follow without much trouble, and to climb into one of the silent, empty

coaches. It was warm and sheltered there. She flung herself down upon the straw, for the dirty velvet cushions seemed too grand to sleep on, and dropped, probably at once, into a heavy sleep.

In the morning, when driver No. 23 of the Urban Line, rolled out his coach, a baby rolled against, and very nearly out of, the door.

Nixy, haggard and terrified, appeared, and picked it up.

"Land of Liberty!" said No. 23. He was over six feet, with fierce whiskers, and voice in proportion.

"Yes," said Nixy, "I'll go right away. I meant to go away before you came. I didn't mean any harm. But nobody liked to take me in, you see, — and it was past midnight. I'll go right away!"

"S'pose I'd ought to report you as a vagrant, no two sides to *that*!" replied 23. But he fell to musing behind his beard.

"*How* old be ye now?"

"Not sixteen."

"Got any folks?"

"No."

"Got anywheres to go?"

"No."

"Go there, then, for all me!" thundered 23, turning his back. "Clear out quick, and I'll let ye alone."

Nixy "cleared."

In the frost of the early morning she wandered about for a while, till the smoke, in little blue coils, screwed holes in a silver sky, and bare-footed children began to group in the chilly sunlight, and odors of crisp muffins and coffee fed the wind.

Nixy knew better than to ask for breakfast, with such a burden as she carried in her arms, at the door of one of the houses whose haughty shadows had repelled her on her midnight tramp. Any one observing her closely would have noticed that she selected rather a shabby street, and, all things considered, the shabbiest dwelling in it, for her errand. It is one of the whims, or instincts, of the poor, to beg favors of their kind. It is also one of their whims, perhaps a foreign fancy which Yankee pride has adopted, never to *seem* hungry under a stranger's roof. So Nixy, knock-



ing timidly, and, bidden by a busy young woman in a busy voice to enter, asked leave to warm her feet, to wash her hands, talked of the weather, the walking, the town, saw a hot breakfast steam before her dizzy eyes; saw the room whirl, felt the words slip; sat up straight and stiff, and dropped a dead weight faint upon the floor.

When she came to herself, the busy young woman had hot tea at her lips in a spoon.

"I never thought of Jacques's money! I can pay you. Here!" Nixy's weak hands fumbled in her pocket. "I suppose I *was* hungry!"

She saw then that some one had taken the baby, and all her faint face flushed.

"The child is over-young to be travelling," said the young woman, with a keen look.

"Yes." Poor Nixy did not know what else to say.

"Four weeks, I should say, makin' guess-work."

"Three, next Tuesday."

The busy young woman exchanged glances with the woman who held the baby. She did not know whether to be most scandalized or

most compassionate ; her answer was indicative of her state of mind.

“Humph ! Travelled far ?”

“I don’t know. It must be some ways. I’m a little tired.”

She was probably a “little tired” still, when she started, in the course of half an hour, to go. It seemed, when the opening of the door brought the fresh air upon her, that she would faint again ; but she shut her white lips together ; she did not mean to die — for she had never fainted before, and supposed herself to be dying — in anybody’s house ; in the open air and under the open sky she felt as if she might have the right to commit so rude a blunder.

She wished, as she went out, holding dizzily by chairs and fences, that she had dared to ask in the house for work. The busy young woman took money for her breakfast, for she was poor as well as busy, and stood looking after her at the door.

“Nothing but a child herself !” — uneasily said. “Though, to be sure, what can one do ?”

What *could* one do ? Other busy people asked

themselves the uneasy question, as Nixy wandered about the streets, white and frightened, through the day.

One woman beckoned her back after she had turned her from the door, questioned her much, and cried over her a little; but when her own child, a little girl, bounded in from somewhere, she sent Nixy hurriedly away.

"I would rather Clara should not see you, if you 'll excuse me."

"I would n't hurt her," said Nixy, stopping upon the steps after the door had closed. She spoke to herself, in some perplexity, and with perplexed eyes she walked away.

At another house, where she asked for work, and where "they could n't think of the child," they compassionately offered her dinner and rest. These she accepted — as she accepted everything that happened — with little surprise and few words.

"I suppose you know how wicked you 've been," suggested the lady of the house, anxious, in the only way that presented itself to her vivid invention, to "reform" the girl.

"Yes," said Nixy, in her unhappy, unmeaning

way. She was wondering where she should spend the night.

"It is a dreadful thing, — you so young !"

"Yes."

"Do you mean to be a better girl ?"

"O yes."

"It will be very hard, — with the child."

"Yes."

The lady looked at her, puzzled.

"I doubt if she understands a thing I say."

But she was mistaken. Nixy had perfectly understood and would remember her last remark. She was growing very tired of the child.

At another place, to which she had been directed, she was told at the door, and the door was shut with the words :—

"We wanted a girl — about your size, but not a baby."

So, by degrees, the baby became horrible.

About dusk, after a weary afternoon, she stopped at the dip of a little hilly street, and in the shadow of a little dark yard that guarded a bright little house, to rest.

The master of the house, whistling his way home to supper, stumbled across her with the

child in her arms, and her head laid stupidly back against a tree. When he saw her he said, —

“This *is* a land of liberty!” — for it was No. 23. He tried to lift her up, but dropped her as if she had been porcelain, and thundered for “Marthy! Marthy Ann!” — he had a voice like the Last Trump; but the summons to “Marthy” disturbed Nixy far more than the noise. She had grown very much afraid of her own kind. Men swore at her generally, discouraged her always, but they asked no questions. Women had held her on a slow toasting-fork of curiosity all day.

So she said to 23 as she had said before, “I’ll go right away!”

But Marthy Ann (she was a little woman) had come out of the bright little house, and drawn Nixy in from the little dark yard; she had a warm hand and a silent tongue, and the girl submitted to her leading.

“Lord help her!” said the little woman, when she had got her into the light. What was quite as much to the point, she kept her for the night.

She could not give her a bed, — the house was far too small for that, — but she rolled her up on a cosey lounge by the bright kitchen fire. All the house was cosey, and all the house was bright. There was a baby somewhere, and she could hear Marthy Ann, in snatches, singing and fondling this baby, and No. 23 whistling and fondling Marthy. She thought, listening from her lounge, that it must be a very happy house.

Something less than an idea, and more than a notion, came for the first time to the Thicket Street girl, of the pure loves of wife and mother. She sat up straight upon her lounge to hear the whole of Marthy's song.

"If I was like *that*," she said, half aloud, "mebbe I'd like the baby without trying."

But she was not like that; it was quite certain that she was not like that.

She lay down again and shut her eyes. Presently she opened them suddenly. 23 and Marthy Ann — in bed and half asleep — were talking of her.

"If it was n't for the child there'd be chances."

"Chances enough. It's a likely girl."

"Now there was Celia Bean. You remember

Celia? The baby's the mischief of it. I'm so glad I had that lounge!"

Marthy, soon asleep, forgot her words. Nixy sat up still and straight, and pondered them in her heart.

The baby was the mischief of it! Was there, then, no way in which she could be the baby's honest mother? She felt a little pity for the child, and patted it softly. But she felt more pity for herself, as was natural under the circumstances.

What with this pity, and the dead of night, and weakness and misery and fear, Nixy concluded, sitting there on Marthy's lounge, that it was about time to be rid of the baby.

By the light of Marthy's cooking-stove, she crept down from her lounge, and found the kitchen door. She unlocked and unlatched it without noise, and then, upon the threshold, stopped. After some thought, she returned to the fire, and, kneeling down upon the floor, held the infant up for a moment in the dying light. Her face exhibited no trace of grief or love; some puzzled regret and a little compassion, but nothing besides.

"Lize was right," she thought, — and thought no more ; " he will take after me when he 's big enough. The poor little fellow ! "

She made as though she would have kissed him, but the inevitable sudden loathing, or something else, prevented her. She drew the child under her shawl again, and, closing Marthy's door very softly behind her, went away with him into the chilly autumn night.

Nixy had no thought of murder. She was not old enough or melodramatic enough for that. To be rid of the child was a simple matter ; to live without him a simpler. She knew something of deserted children and foundling homes, — she had not lived fifteen years in Thicket Street for nothing. It occurred to her, as she glided along, like an uneasy ghost, through the silent and sleeping town, dodging police and street-lamps, to leave her little boy in the curiously gabled house with the wonderful room. It made very little difference to her where she left him ; there was this house ; it saved trouble, and was near at hand. Possibly she had some dim idea, that, for the sake of their own new baby, the people in the happy house would take some pains to be



kind to hers ; for she would rather like to have him well treated, — it was not his fault that nobody wanted her.

At any rate, with the thought she had found the house. She knew it easily, for the sick-lamp was still burning in the bright room, and the wind was tossing the curtain in and out ; and with the sight of the house, her mind settled apathetically into the plan. The child had grown so heavy ! The world was growing so cruel ! One place was like another. Her arms ached. Why seek farther ?

We talk of “instinctive maternal affection.” I cannot learn that Nixy, when she left her child, with a violent pull at the door-bell, upon the massive steps of the gabled house, experienced any other than emotions of relief. To be sure, when the child’s little fingers fumbled feebly over her face, she thought that his hands were soft, thought of Marthy and *her* baby, wondered who Celia Bean was, and what happened to her, and so was reminded of 23, and of being reported as a vagrant, and that it was quite time to be away. With little regret she kissed her child, — for the first time and the last. With nothing more posi-

tive either way than a dull sense of comfort, she folded her shawl about her empty arms, and stole off down the pebbled drive, into the wide, empty, solitary street. She had done by her own flesh and blood as the world had done by her. It seemed to this poor little mother rather a fair arrangement than otherwise.

Only, when half a mile away from the child, she stopped and thought of Lize.

"But I kep' my promise," she said, looking troubled, for she did not like to break a promise to Lize. "I kep' it. I tried to like him. But there's nowheres, no folks. What could we do?"

She fell to sobbing, — thinking of Lize, — she was so weak from walking, and homesick, and alone; she wished that she were back in No. 19 upon the straw; wished that she had gone, as Moll advised, into the concert-hall; wished that she could see Monsieur Jacques; wished that she had stayed among "her folks," — meaning Thicket Street. When one has no family, one adopts a county, a cause, an alley, as the case may be. It seemed to Nixy, in her desperate mood, to be a great mistake that she had ever undertaken this dreary attempt at "staying hon-

est." Why should she be better than her kind ? In Thicket Street, at least, she was at home. In this world of pure men and women she was bewildered, lost.

So, gloomily thinking, she travelled the country up and down for a couple of miserable days. She seldom consciously missed her child, excepting with a sense of relief ; yet the weight of the little thing, gone from her empty arms, burdened her heart at times in a dull way. He had been some company.

She never went back to 23 and Marthy Ann, — not daring to without the child ; she was quite out of the region by daylight. In her confused condition, however, she must have trodden a circle like a lost traveller in a forest, for, on the third day, faint and discouraged, — Jacques's money all gone and the girl's brave heart too, — she was seen climbing the pebbled slope to the curiously gabled house which had attracted her twice before. That was at dead of night ; now, in fair sunlight, and blinded by exhaustion, she did not know the place.

"Do you know of anybody as wants a girl?"

She asked the old question stupidly, looking

for the old answer. As it happened, "Mis' Myrtle *was* hard up for help," and, to her surprise, Nixy was bidden to enter, and sent to the mistress of the mansion for inspection.

The lady was in her bedroom, and a little pink cradle stood by her side. On the threshold of the chamber Nixy stopped short. She recognized the slow, soft curtain, the light bay-window, pictures, pillows, and the wailing cry of the "wonderful room."

The frightened color rushed to her face. She peered into corners, expecting to be confronted by her deserted child, turned and would have fled, but Mrs. Myrtle — Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle, by the way, she was commonly called — detained her sharply.

"Don't be afraid of me! I won't hurt you. Besides, you let the air in on Baby. There, — stand where I can see you. I suppose some one directed you here? I've had such a time getting girls!"

"So I heard," said Nixy, roused now, and shrewd.

"I want a girl," continued Mrs. Myrtle, raising her head, — it was a handsome head, fresh

from the crimping-irons of her maid, — “to take steps for me, and help nurse, and all that ; to make herself useful wherever and whenever wanted ; to keep herself tidy, and *not* run about evenings. I have such a time with my girls ! Why did you leave your last place ? ”

“ Family moved West,” said Nixy, feeling her way with care.

“ You came from town ? ”

Nixy nodded, in no haste to commit herself by many words. Not that she objected to telling a lie, — why should she ? — but that she preferred to tell a good one.

The amount of it was — for when Nixy had become convinced that there was but one child in the room, she and her story both appeared to advantage — that Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle engaged her services.

“ Age, under sixteen.

“ Temper, amiable.

“ Common-school education.

“ Seen service before.

“ Lost her recommendations.

“ Respectable family connection.

“ Widowed mother — ”

Mrs. Myrtle ran over the notes which she had taken of Nixy's conversation.

"I think, on the whole, I will try you. Though I *do* object to your having lost your recommendations. Nobody ever has such a time with girls as I! And there's no knowing whom you may take in. The number of tramps about is alarming. It cannot be three days—is it, nurse?—since Boggs picked up that baby on our steps. It made me so nervous and depressed! I have n't got over it yet. I am sure I thought I should be forced to send for the doctor again, though I don't think Doctor Burtis has the least comprehension of NERVES! Boggs took the child to the Burley Street Nursery,—an excellent place. But such a thing never happened on my premises before,—never! It was so sad and depressing! Yes, I think, on the whole, I will try you."

"Depressing as it is," Mrs. Myrtle explained to her husband, "to take an unknown girl into the family, especially a girl with no more constitution for housework than this one has,—I cannot send her up stairs but she loses her breath in a very unpleasant manner,—I wish to make a faithful and patient trial of it. I have so few

opportunities of active usefulness, confined as I am with the children and my nervous condition, that I really feel it, in one sense, a duty to try the girl. I see nothing bad about her so far, and she is willing about taking steps, which, in my weak state, is a great thing. I think I shall take real comfort in giving her a comfortable home."

Nixy remained in Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle's "comfortable home" two weeks.

On a Sabbath morning at the end of that time, Mrs. Myrtle went to church. The day was superb, the carriage recushioned, her recovery complete, her baby well, her bonnet and prayer-book new. She patted Nixy on the head as she swept smiling out of the door, and bade her take the air on the lawn with one of the little girls, — she was looking pale; and Fanny would enjoy it. Besides, she (Nixy) had, she must say, been very faithful since she had been with her, and she was glad to give her a change. Perhaps she could manage to let her out to the evening service. It was too sweet a Sunday to be misimproved.

Nixy listened humbly. If she had not felt "at home" in Mrs. Myrtle's service, she had at least enjoyed the honest large work and honest small

pay. Her dark attic room was palatial to a No. 19 girl ; her dinner (without desserts) luxurious ; her conscience quiet ; her hands full ; her past wellnigh forgotten in the novelty, and her future of no consequence in the security.

In a certain way she was almost happy, as she sat in the golden Sabbath sun, waiting, with troublesome Fanny, for her mistress's return.

In the Sabbath sun, Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle rode home from the house of God with a black brow and a fast whip. The first thing that she saw was Nixy, sitting under a tinted maple-tree, with the child Fanny's arms about her neck. This looked very affectionate, but it was in fact very uncomfortable. It made a pretty picture, however, for the light and color gathered richly about Nixy's young face, which, however miserable or pallid, was fair, because it was young. And Mrs. Myrtle, just at that moment, would have preferred that the girl should look ugly ; it would have been, I think, a positive moral relief to her.

For the lady had heard that morning, naturally enough, Nixy's sorrowful story.

Nixy felt it in the air, like thunder, before Boggs had reined up at the door.



“Fanny!” Mrs. Myrtle, perfumed and perturbed, prayer-book in hand, and eyes on fire, called her daughter. “Take down your arms—at once!—from Nixy’s neck, and go into the house.”

The little girl hesitated to obey, and her mother, with some emphasis, herself removed the offending hands from Nixy’s shoulders; in so doing, by accident, something hit Nixy a sharp blow upon the cheek; it proved to be the edge of the prayer-book,—a rich one in full calf.

“What a pity!”

“You did not hurt me,” said Nixy.

The lady colored. She had been examining the dented leather when she spoke; but upon Nixy’s “accepting the apology” so simply, she remained silent.

She remained silent long enough to speak perhaps more calmly than she might otherwise have done.

“This is a dreadful story which I hear of you, Nixy. It has really made me ill.”

Nixy folded her hands and leaned back against the maple-tree. She did not much care what happened next.

"I mean that you were seen, — I heard it twice this morning, — that you were seen a fortnight ago, in the streets of this town, with an infant in your arms. It is of no use to deny it, so many people saw you. I hear it upon the best of authority. It must be true."

"I suppose *you* sent it to the Burley Street Nursery."

To Mrs. Myrtle's exceeding surprise, Nixy made this answer.

"Well, I must say! I am glad that you confess it with so little trouble. But you lied to me."

"O yes. I wanted honest work. You would n't have taken me, ma'am, if I'd told you the truth."

"No," — Mrs. Myrtle looked undecided whether to feel rebuked or flattered, — "no, of course not. With my family, of course not. And of course I must dismiss you at once."

"Of course," repeated Nixy, languidly. She had learned enough of the pure world now to know that. She sat very still, with the happy light from the maple dotting her dress and hair in a mocking, miserable manner.

"This is so dreadful and depressing!" sighed Mrs. Myrtle, after an uneasy silence.

"Shall I go to-night?" asked Nixy.

"Well — not to-night, perhaps ; but to-morrow early. With my family of innocent children I *cannot* feel as if I ought to keep you under my roof."

"I'd rather go to-night," said Nixy. "I would n't want to hurt the children." She was too much disheartened to be bitter ; she spoke quietly enough, but Mrs. Myrtle looked dully disturbed.

"I do not wish to hurry you away — into mischief. I suppose you can reform, and be better, and all that. If it were n't for the children — but how *could* I feel it to be right to put my Fanny under your influence? I would consult with Mr. Myrtle about it, if there were any chance that we could think it best. We could not, you see, sacrifice our own offspring to your reformation, though it would be very Christian and beautiful. So I do not see how I can do more than to forgive you for your ingratitude in so dreadfully deceiving me ; which I do."

"Thank you," said listless Nixy.

"And to beg of you to consider that there is hope for us all," — Mrs. Myrtle spoke with hu-

mility, — “for us *all*, in the way of salvation, which our Lord has marked out for sinners.”

If the lady had referred to a way of salvation from the frosty night, from the hungry morning, from the wandering week, which Nixy, sitting under the warm maple-tree, vividly foresaw, and from which, in her silence, she was shrinking with a very sick young heart, the girl might, I must own, have paid better heed to the advice. Nixy knew little about heaven, cared less; earth was as much as she could manage just then. She glanced at the dented prayer-book, and wondered, in a mixed thought of how she should carry her clothes, and whether she should go back to Thicket Street, if the Lord had told Mrs. Myrtle, in his house that day, to send her away for fear of Fanny; and if he cared so much more for Fanny than for her. It was natural that he should. She only wondered about it, speculatively.

“I must do my *duty*, you know,” urged Mrs. Myrtle, uneasily. “It is not want of Christian sympathy which compels me to dismiss you. I have always been much interested in women of your class. When my health permits, I have

gone to the Magdalen Home twice a month to cut out work. That is a very interesting and Christian retreat. I wonder you never thought of going there. I could easily — ”

“ I should like to go away now, if you please.”

Nixy spoke and rose hurriedly, visions of Dr. Burtis and the 'sylum passing with the old terror before her.

“ I 'd like to go now, without waiting, Mrs. Myrtle.”

“ Stay till afternoon,” urged Mrs. Myrtle, uncomfortably. “ I don't mean to be severe with you. You make me so nervous, hurrying matters in this manner ! If it were n't for the children — ”

But Nixy had stepped out from the rich warmth of the maple's light, and was, as the lady spoke, crossing the darker shadows of the lawn, on her way to the kitchen door.

Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle, searching for the girl with troubled face, immediately after her noon nap, discovered that she had already gone.

“ Nothing *could* give me more pleasure in my circumscribed field of usefulness,” she confided to Mr. Myrtle, “ than to help such girls, — in their

places, you know ; but when it comes to receiving them, under circumstances, too, of aggravated deception, into one's own family, I feel that there *are* domestic duties which have sacred prior claims. I would, on reflection, have kept her until Monday, and have done what little I could for her ; but she got vexed with me, — such girls are always getting vexed, — and left, I believe, without her dinner. I don't think that any one appreciates how depressing the affair has been !”

## CHAPTER VI.

### "STAYING HONEST."

"**H**E who has seen the suffering of men has seen nothing, he must see the suffering of women; he who has seen the suffering of women has seen nothing, he must see the suffering of children."

Nixy united in her own experience at this time the suffering of the child and the woman.

Not being familiar with Victor Hugo, she did not reflect upon the fact in the Frenchman's apt language. But she considered herself to be very unhappy, and when a Thicket Street girl considers herself to be unhappy, she usually means it. The life which Nixy had led had not cultivated in her a tendency to "the blues," it must be understood.

Upon leaving the service and the house of Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle, she struck out several miles into the open country.

The country always seemed to Nixy like a long breath. It was, to her fancy, purity, rest, renovation. It was, in her own language, "chances."

With a certain dogged determination not to return hastily to Thicket Street, the concert-room, and Moll, — a determination which I think even Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle would not have found "depressing" in view of Nixy's possible "reformation," — the girl travelled about in the beautiful autumn weather, searching for some one to help her to "stay honest" for seven days.

It was wonderful weather. All the golden air melted about her. All the trees hung out, so she thought, Chinese lanterns for her. A few brown butterflies lingered languidly in the sun. A few bright birds twittered on the warm fences. Torpid grasshoppers, roused and heated, sprung from the fading grass. The leaves rustled, and the nuts were sweet upon the ground.

Nixy's eyes and heart took these things in. At times they reminded her of Lize, and of what she said about her boy, should he come home. At other times they recalled the song which Marthy Ann sung; the birds sang it, the grass-



hoppers hummed it, the butterflies nodded time ; Nixy, stopping to rest, listened, and felt still and clean for a little while.

It was only for a little while. Some one, suspicious of "tramps," disturbed her roughly, or questioned her curiously ; she then forgot about Marthy ; she generally fell to wondering why the world should be full of butterflies and yellow leaves, and no place in it for a girl who never saw either before. Generally, then, she was reminded that she had eaten no dinner, and both leaves and butterflies were forgotten.

Through the day, and by sunlight, the edge of her hungry, homeless, heart-sick life was blunted a little thus, in spots. They were the nights which were hard. Some of them she spent out of doors, under fences, in barns, in sheds. Some of them she spent under suspicious or ungracious roofs. We do not, as a people, take to stragglers kindly ; in the thickly settled regions of "Institutions" and "Retreats," it is not, perhaps, considered good sense or good charity. Nothing romantic happened to Nixy ; nobody offered to adopt or endow her, educate or marry her. People looked curiously into her colorless face, con-

sidered her young to be travelling alone, gave her food or advice, as the case might be, and went about their business: Men and women who would have wept over her at a prayer-meeting sent her on her lonely, tempted way without a thought.

One excellent man, who had lodged her and prayed with her on Sabbath night, refused her work in his factory on Monday morning; yet no rack or stake could have extorted from that man a deliberate wrong; and for the Lord Jesus Christ, whose feet the sinner washed, he would have died as calmly as he cast accounts; he simply failed to see the links of a syllogism.

Why lay all the stupidity of good men to the charge of Christianity?

So, years after, I used to hear Nixy say.

As I said, she suffered; she was hungry, cold, sick, frightened, tempted. These are very simple words; to a girl of sixteen they are very tremendous facts.

The worst of it was that nobody wanted her. Of this she became slowly convinced. Nobody wanted her "honest" life; there was no room for it in all this lighted, unspotted, golden country,

as there had been none in Jeb Smith's saloon. There was no room for it in all God's world.

What then?

Nixy had decided what then, on a certain damp, drizzly, dreary morning which found her on the outskirts of a little busy town, very tired and weak.

"Pale as a peppermint," the woman said who gave her breakfast, and did not ask her where she belonged, "for fear," she explained, "of hearing some dreadful story."

"If nobody *does* want me," thought Nixy, "afore night, I might as well go back. I thought there was places; I thought there was folks."

But "nobody had wanted her" when the night fell. It was rather a chilly night, and she stopped, caring little where she went, in search of a convenient place to warm her hands.

Leaning weakly and dejectedly on a fence, partly in thought, partly in exhaustion, a young girl, passing, saw her. There was low light in the west, and Nixy's face turned westward. Her hair was much tumbled, and her dress disordered. She was perfectly pale, and her mouth had drawn at the corners like the mouth of a

person in a fever. Her hands were dropped at her sides, like a paralytic's. There was a little of the same kind of attraction about her which there is about the Dying Gladiator. She would haunt one's dreams rather than touch one's heart. Her youth and possible beauty softened, but did not mitigate, this impression. On a background of Roman ruins she would have been as effective as a rich romance ; against a Yankee fence she was simply painful.

The girl who passed her — warm, rosy, elastic, wrapped in some kind of soft white woollen garment — half paused, turning to see who the straggler was. Nixy, too, turned, and their eyes met for a moment.

"You look cold !" said the young lady, just as she would have said good morning.

"I do well enough," said Nixy, sullenly.

"Come into the house and get warm, Mother would be glad to have you."

Nixy refused shortly, and moved away. She felt instinctively repelled from this snow-white, safe, comfortable girl ; did not wish to be under obligations to her, — a girl no older than herself, yet so white, so safe, so comfortable !

The young lady tripped up the steps and shut the door. Nixy heard her as she roamed defiantly away ; wondered what was inside of the door ; half wished that she had stayed to get warm and see.

She warmed herself finally in a grocery store. The store had a bright sign, a bright window, a bright fire, and a bright old man, and only one, behind the counter. The old man was singing. Partly because he was old, and partly because he was singing, he reminded her of Monsieur Jacques, and she ventured in.

The old man gave her a keen look over his spectacles.

"The world," said he, "is upside-down, — quite. It is like the Scotchman's favorite parson ; it 'joombles the joodgment and confoonds the sense.' I give it up ! One must stand on one's own feet. Sit down."

Nixy, supposing herself to be so directed, had remained standing on "her own feet" by the fire. Much perplexed, she sat down. She leaned her head upon her hand, and, as the grocer offered no further remarks, she sat very still.

"She ought to be in the nursery," said the old gentleman, after a pause. "I give it up!"

The old gentleman appeared to be answering an unasked conundrum, which embarrassed Nixy, because she did not know but she was expected to guess it. She had, indeed, half decided to ask him; but customers came in, and she refrained.

She discovered, in a few moments, that she was becoming the object of remark, and, thinking that it might be unpleasant to the old gentleman to be found sheltering her, she started to leave the store. But he stopped her peremptorily.

"Give it up? No! If it's anybody's business whom I choose to have sit by my fire, the world's come to a pass indeed. Stay where you are!"

The grocer nodded so furiously, and glared at his customers so alarmingly, that Nixy, not knowing what else to do, stayed.

"Hobbs — all over," observed a little fellow buying coffee, glancing at Nixy then, and whispering. Uncomfortable at being thus discussed, Nixy rose with a sigh of relief when the grocer's customers, one by one, had dropped out.

"I did n't mean to make you trouble," she said,

speaking quite low. It was beginning to grow upon her that she made a great deal of trouble in the world.

“Trouble, indeed!” exclaimed Mr. Hobbs. “You’d better give *that* up! If Mrs. Hobbs—well, in fact, there never *was* a Mrs. Hobbs (the world is all upside-down!) or you’d go to my house to-night short metre. But if money—”

“I’m not a beggar,” said Nixy; for this did not seem to her like taking money from Monsieur Jacques.

“One must stand on one’s own feet, to be sure,” meditated Mr. Hobbs. “Perhaps you’re right. All I’ve got to say, then, is, *Don’t* give it up!”

But Nixy was just about ready to give it up.

Dusk deepened into dark early that night, and heavily. Lights twinkled thickly, however, all over the little town, and the girl seemed to herself, on leaving the grocer’s, to be walking confusedly in a golden net. It reminded her of the red web that the red spider had woven on the walls of the second front seaward corner in No. 19. In the same manner it grew and brightened. It narrowed and tightened in the same manner. It was probably the association of the fancy, or

want of supper, or the tremulous confusion caused by Mr. Hobbs's coffee-customer, who, from a doorstep somewhere, startled and spoke rudely to her, which induced the conviction that she heard Monsieur Jacques ; but all the way through the golden web she heard him : —

“ Down at the bottom of the hill,  
It's lonely — lonely ! ”

Following the bright meshes of the web, quite at the will of the web it seemed to her, she found herself suddenly leaning on the fence again, where the girl in snow-white woollen had spoken with her. Before, she had scarcely noticed the house. Now, the lamps being lighted, and the curtains raised, one could not but notice it, — not so much for any one thing, or any rich thing in the furnishing of the house, but for a certain fine, used, home-like air which invested the whole, as far as Nixy could see it, to the very crickets, — an air which even Nixy, and even then, felt, as one feels the effect of a very intricate harmony which one appreciates without understanding.

She unlatched the gate very softly, and crept — still, as it seemed, in the will of the glittering web — through the yard to the window.





CHAPTER VII.

"GOD'S FOLKS."

**M**Y friend Mrs. Purcell is a woman whom it is impossible to describe.

Although I am stepping all unbidden into the straightforward history of Eunice Trent, to attempt her description.

If I call her a remarkable woman, I have nothing to show for the adjective. She never headed a "cause," delivered a lecture, wrote a book, had a "mission." She darns her own stockings, bakes her own bread, goes to the "sewing-circle," believes in her minister, takes life on patience, heaven on trust.

If I call her a beautiful woman, I must dissect my language: she has been a sick woman, and long sick; her cheeks lack tint, her hands life; she has worn old dresses on occasions, her own hair always; I believe that her features are irregular, her figure emaciated. She is also a

widow, and widows — those, at least, who, like Margaret Purcell, are “widows indeed” — are apt to become monotonous, romance growing rusty in them with their bombazine, all the colors of life fading pale as their caps.

If I call her a literary woman, I shall make a great mistake ; she makes a business of a book, not a passion ; can criticise Milton, but loses Paradise without emotion.

It is not difficult, as you see, to put Mrs. Purcell into words, negatively. Positively, I should say that she is intelligent, rather than literary ; fascinating, not beautiful ; more sensible than remarkable, — then I should try again.

An open wood-fire, an April day, supper-time, Pre-Raphaelitism, autumn leaves, cologne-water, — she has reminded me in turn of all these. Having had my fancy and my comprehension thus abused, I am always ready on demand, like Mr. Hobbs, to “give her up.”

When I have added that I am speaking rather of what she was than is, and yet seem to be speaking none the less of what she is than was, since she rules, like the Récamier, as royally at seventy as at seventeen, I have, perhaps, exhaust-

ed my descriptive resources. To be economical, then, of useless metaphors, it was upon Margaret Purcell's parlor that Nixy, through the window, looked; and Margaret and her daughter sat therein alone together.

There was much color, of the shades which retain rather than reflect light, about the room; pale walls, pictures, a guitar, books,—these things lay about Mrs. Purcell as naturally as the folds of her dress. She and the young lady were sitting as she and Christina generally sit of an evening,—the one on a cricket at the other's feet, in the light of a very soft porcelain-shaded lamp. Christina still had on her little white jacket, unbuttoned at the throat and thrown back. As Nixy came to the window, she was sitting with her face slightly upturned, and Margaret, as it happened, was stroking the happy face (Christina always has a happy face) slowly and softly—a little absently, for they were talking—with her thin ringed hand.

Nixy, from the dark, looked in. She thought of Thicket Street and Moll. She wondered, very bitterly for Nixy, for she was learning in an immature fashion to be bitter, what that snow-

white girl would do, if dropped like a cloud into No. 19. She wondered, and this was not bitter, if the lady with the thin hands were ill, unhappy. She thought of Lize, of Marthy Ann. She thought of the Burley Street Nursery, and Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle's prayer-book, — an odd jumble of things. She wondered if Mrs. Myrtle were more religious than Monsieur Jacques; if the lady here with the white daughter were religious; if it were because people were white and religious that they all turned her from their doors; then, abruptly, how *she* would look sitting in the light of a porcelain lamp, with a white sack on.

She had pressed her haggard young face close to the window-glass, eager to see the young lady, and lost in her broken, miserable musing.

She meant to go back to Thicket Street. That was quite settled. She would beg no longer at the doors of a better life. She remembered with a regret as keen as if she had fallen from heaven, not Thicket Street, her life as her life had been a year ago; remembered her dream about the hill, and all the paths which blocked her down. Was her story marked upon her face, that no-

body — nobody anywhere — should want her? Was she scarred, stained? This puzzled her; she did not feel exactly stained. She did not feel like a bad girl. She had wanted to be good. But, there being nobody to help her, "nowheres, no folks," there was an end.

All the "chances" closed with spring-locks when *she* drew near. The hand of every man was against her. All the world held up its dainty skirts. All the world had hedged her in.

These things, confusedly, came to her looking in at Margaret Purcell's window. Another thing, very distinctly, came to her.

It was a new respect for Moll Manners's judgment. Moll was right about the devil: "Go you must."

She felt very cold, for the wind was rising. She drew her shawl together, and, turning, would have left the window, but it seemed to her, very strangely and suddenly, as if the golden web had tied her there. All the lights of the town nodded brightly; all the trees rustled like a whisper. Street-music, somewhere in the distance, reminded her of the concert-saloon, and she stood still.

It seemed to her that she would rather lie down in the golden mist and die, than go back to Thicket Street. Life and Thicket Street being one, life grew so horrible! Years in Thicket Street, "unrespited, unpitied, unreprieved," piled on her fancy like years in hell.

"I'd like to know if God hain't got any folks," she said. God did not often occur to her.

Some one across the street — Mr. Hobbs's rude customer, perhaps — was watching the little straggler. This she discovered somewhat suddenly, started, and, in starting, hit Mrs. Purcell's window with her elbow.

So Christina, a little alarmed, turned her happy face and saw her, wan and white, looking in. And so, from very womanly pity, she and Margaret went out, rashly and royally enough, and drew the girl within the door.

When Mrs. Purcell had done this, she repented of it, undoubtedly, for it was very imprudent. I never knew a woman who had so much of what Ecce Homo calls "the enthusiasm of humanity" as Margaret Purcell; and, on the whole, I think I never knew a woman make so few blunders on it. Christianity, like any other business, should

be transacted on method ; like any other business, also, it loses nothing by the courage to speculate occasionally.

My friend at least is shrewd enough to hold her tongue, on necessity, about her ventures. So, having thoroughly followed her impulses, and then thoroughly alarmed herself at having admitted this wanderer — beggar, thief, infected, or worse, or who knew what ? — into her family, and at night, neither her daughter nor her guest (for poor Nixy was now her guest, according to Margaret's code of etiquette) was permitted to detect either her uneasiness or her regret.

"You are sick !" she said, decidedly. "Come to the fire."

Nixy came, staggering a little. She heard Christina say, as the porcelain-shielded lamp flashed light on her, — "I saw that girl to-night ! Out by the fence," and wished that the young lady would keep still. She wanted to hear the other woman talk ; liked the sound of her voice ; was reminded, in a stupid fashion, of Lize, speaking of her boy, — and then, in the heat, spread out her hands, tried to speak, failed, and fell.

"Right on my parlor carpet!" thought Mrs. Purcell, as Nixy dropped, prone and wretched, in the rich, warm room.

Nixy had not fainted. It seemed to be rather the utter giving out of heart than body. Something in the atmosphere of the room stunned her. Something in Mrs. Purcell's voice (Margaret has rather an unusual voice, combining, I have often fancied, the elements of a battle-cry and a cradle-song) struck her harder than blows. She put it in her own words more emphatically than I can in mine, when, looking up into the lady's face, pale and suffocated, she gasped, —

"I 'm gin out!"

Mrs. Purcell's reply was equally apt:—

"Christina, open the window!"

What with air and supper, and what with rubbings and warmings, and all manner of womanly "fussing," Nixy by and by revived a little.

The room, the house, the people, their touch, words, astonished her. They did not seem "wonderful," like Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle's curtained chamber. They reminded her rather, as I said, of Lize; of Marthy and Marthy's baby; of autumn woods and butterflies; of certain moments,



very rare, when she had stopped on her wanderings to rest, and sat half buried in leaves and sunshine, warmed and weak, with her eyes shut, and her heart so quiet that she could not remember, if she tried, who Nixy Trent might be. Those were the times when she had felt "still and clean."

She sat crouched on a cricket by Mrs. Purcell's fire, with her hands folded, and a slight quivering, like that of a sensitive-plant about to close, at the corners of her mouth. She had not — never could have had, I think — a coarse mouth.

Christina, in her little white sack, puzzled and compassionate, sat on the other side of the grate, and tried to be hospitable. "For we cannot turn her out of doors to-night," her mother had said.

"I'm glad she is better," said Christina, half to her mother, half to the stranger, not knowing what else to say. Christina had a very simple, straightforward way of speaking; it struck Nixy, as it strikes every one, pleasantly, and she looked, for the first time, fully into her face. The young lady, she thought, had eyes like a white star.

"I'll go now, if you want me to," she said.

"O no!" said Christina.

"But I am better, as you said, and I am not a beggar. I'll put up somewheres else, where folks is poor, and don't mind the likes of me so much."

Mrs. Purcell noticed then, what she often noticed afterwards, — the curious mingling of rough and elegant grammar in Nixy's language.

Christina turned to her mother, much disturbed, making Nixy no answer. Mrs. Purcell had been pacing the room. This was rather a mannish habit for Margaret ; she acquired it from walking the house with her husband, who was a nervous man. She had been pacing the room, not knowing whether to be most pitiful or most perplexed.

"Christina," she said, after a little thought, "will you step up stairs and put the little gray room in order? — and, if I want you, I will call you."

Christina, disappointed, like any other girl, obeyed. Margaret drew the chair which she had vacated near to Nixy ; she had not liked to question the girl with her daughter by.

"You must have journeyed far," she began, hesitatingly, reluctant to seem inquisitive. "Mrs.

Purcell is a woman of — ideas, — you know," people have said of her. It was one of her "ideas" at that time, as at most times in her life, that because you are what would be denominated "below her" is, if any, an additional reason why you should be treated with courtesy. The family affairs of her butcher are as sacred from her intrusion as Mr. Longfellow's. She will wait her gardener's invitation to cross his threshold. I have heard her beg her cook's pardon, and bid good morning to her chambermaid. So she asked this question of Nixy, with the manner in which she would have inquired for the health of, for instance, Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle; more deferentially, it must be owned, than she *had* been known to address that lady, when they had met, as they occasionally had, at the meetings of the "Magdalen Home Trustees."

"From the city," said Nixy. In appearance, Nixy was examining the knick-knacks upon the *étagère*, near which she sat; in fact, she was considering whether she should tell this lady the truth; it seemed rather a pity to cheat her, especially as she had not been the gainer from lying to Mrs. Myrtle.

"Have you no friends?"

"No. One old woman as nursed me, — but I ran away; and an old fellow with guitars, — but he's of no account."

"An old woman who — you have been ill then?"

"Sick enough." She finished her sentence in a whisper.

There was a pause. Mrs. Purcell thanked fortune that she had sent Christina up stairs. Nixy ate her hat-string, and wondered if she would be allowed to sleep in "the little gray room" *now*. Mrs. Purcell broke the silence by saying, gently, —

"You look very young."

"Nigh sixteen."

"Not sixteen!"

Christina was scarcely older than that. Again Mrs. Purcell thanked fortune that she had sent her daughter up stairs. Again she paused, and again she broke the pause gently, this time with a broken voice, to say, —

"You poor little girl!"

Nixy lifted her quick eyes. For the first time they filled, but they did not overflow; and that

sensitive quiver to her lips increased, but she did not cry.

"What became of the child? Do not tell me if you object."

"Just as lieves. I left him on her steps. Carried him round 'long 's I could. I promised Lize I'd try to like him. But I could n't. Nobody'd have me. Nobody'd have me anyway; folks is all afraid I'll hurt the children, and such. He was an awful heavy baby for three weeks!"

*"Three weeks!"*

"Less'n three when I come off. I s'pose I got kind o' tuckered out walkin' so early; mebbe that 's the reason I dropped on your carpet; 't ain't the first time I've dropped on folks's carpets comin' in and restin' sudden. I was sorry, for it is a pretty carpet. I'm all mud gener'lly. She had him picked off the steps, and Boggs took it to a Nursery. I never asked no more questions. I did n't care much."

*"Who took it?"*

"A lady as I ran steps for two weeks. Had one of her own about as old as the other, I reckon."

"So you have been at work?" Mrs. Purcell

asked, encouraged by Nixy's communicativeness, which astonished herself no more than it did Nixy.

"O yes. She turned me off, you know, when folks told her. She thought it was her duty. Very like. I don't know; I don't know very much. Nobody never learned me."

"Have you been looking for work all this while?"

"A week since, — yes. Housework, factories, shops, saloons. Nobody wants me. I'm not a beggar. I wanted to stay honest. It don't seem to be any use. There ain't anywheres, nor there ain't any folks. I'm going back to-morrow."

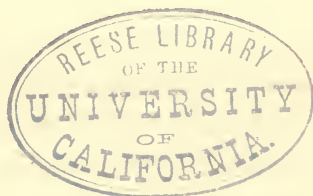
She spoke the last words like a person in dull pain, a little thickly and stupidly. Mrs. Purcell began to pace the room again.

"Going back where?"

"To Thicket Street, that's where I come from, — Thicket Street. 'T ain't so much matter there, you see. I'd — rather — not; but nobody wants me, and I'm tired of being a beggar. Thank ye kindly, ma'am, for letting me set by your fire, and I think I'll be going. Somebody better used to poor folks will take me in."

Mrs. Purcell colored.

"If you will not be unhappy to stay with me," she said, stopping her walk across the room suddenly, "stay till to-morrow. I should like, perhaps, to talk with you again. My daughter will — no, I will show you to your room myself."



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE GRAY ROOM.

“CHRISTINA !”

Christina sat by the fire again, now that Nixy had gone to bed. Mrs. Purcell was walking very nervously up and down and across the room.

“Christina, come here !”

Christina came. Her mother drew her into the light, and held up the girl's bright face in her two hands. She had no sooner touched the saucy face than she dropped it, and walked the room for a space again. Presently she came back, and, with unusual persistency in an unusual caress, drew her daughter's face once more into the light, and once more, and without a smile, examined it.

Christina sat mute and lovely ; she did not dare to be mischievous.

It *was* a lovely face, all dimples and color,



very healthy, very happy, not very wise, with lips too merry to be moulded, — they had never been still long enough, — and eyes, as Nixy had thought, “like a white star.” Christina, Margaret avers, has her dead father’s eyes. It was a face for any mother to be proud of, and careful for ; for which to thank Heaven’s mercy, and to pray Heaven’s protection ; a face to trust, and a face to watch.

“But snow is no whiter !” said Margaret, as if speaking to an unseen listener. Her hand fell, as she dropped the upturned face, on her daughter’s head, and lay there for a moment, gently.

“Why do you bless me, mother ?” asked Christina, winking briskly. It always made her cry to feel her mother’s hand upon her head, and she disapproved of crying for nothing.

“Go to bed, and say your prayers !” said Margaret, bluntly. “No, — on the whole, stop a moment. I don’t know what to do with that poor girl up stairs !”

Christina liked to be “consulted,” as she often was, upon family affairs. Margaret, upon prin-

ciple, took her daughter into her confidence whenever she could. She grew at once grave and womanly, and she came at once, shrewdly enough, to the point.

“What do you *want* to do with her, mother?”

This was exactly what Mrs. Purcell did not know.

“I think, at least, that I shall keep her for a couple of days to rest. She is ill, and ought not to be travelling about alone. She wants work. It will be very little trouble to let her stay in the corner-room for a night or two, unless you object to having her about. She will not want anything of you, though.”

“I wish she did,” said Christina, simply. “She looks so forlorn !”

“She *does* look sick.”

“I don’t wonder she could n’t find work,” continued Christina, lifting her innocent eyes. Her mother watched them. “*I* could n’t find work, if I had to earn my living, unless I could make tatting or give music-lessons. I’ve been thinking all this evening how funny that I should be your daughter, and she should be she, you know. How long has she been sick?”

Mrs. Purcell was taken aback by the abruptness of the question.

"I have not inquired very fully into particulars," she answered, evasively. "And if I were you, Christina, I should not question her much. I should rather that you would not. You do not want to be impertinent because the girl is poor."

"Of course not." Christina, who was a little lady to her fingers' ends, looked grieved at the implication. Her mother half repented having made it, partly because Christina did not deserve it, partly because it was not altogether honestly made. But it was too late to retract; and what else could she have done, looking into the young girl's starry eyes? They were not eyes to be darkened by a breath of Nixy's black story.

"At least, as I said before," she continued, after a silence, "I will keep the girl for a couple of days; perhaps, by looking about, I can find something for her to do. It does not seem exactly Christian to send her off again without making at least an effort to help her. She has no mother."

Christina was very sleepy, or she would have expressed herself upon that subject. Shutting

the door, on her way to bed, she stopped, in thought.

“ You know it ’s next week Ann goes ? ”

“ What of that ? ”

“ I did n’t know but you might like — out of charity, and all that — to take this sick girl in her place. I suppose she’d be any amount of bother ! ”

“ I suppose she would. I will think it over, however.”

I can hardly explain by what mental process Mrs. Purcell had preferred to await this very suggestion from her daughter’s lips ; certain it is, that she had been revolving it in her troubled thought the entire evening, and that her objections to it, which were very strong, narrowed, as she found on careful inspection, to one word, — Christina.

Nixy shut the door of the little corner-room with wondering eyes. In all her life she had never laid down and slept in a room like it. It was small, and simply furnished, but it was soft and gray, — gray was a color that Nixy particularly fancied, — and there was a shade of

silver-gray in counterpane, wood-work, carpet, papering, curtains; a little gray statuette upon the mantel, and a few pictures in gray frames about the walls.

When she was left alone, and when Mrs. Purcell's step had dropped into silence upon the carpeted stairs, Nixy stood just in the middle of the gray room for a few moments, almost without motion, almost without breath.

It seemed to her like the first twilight which she saw settle down upon the open country. It stilled her. It folded her in. It spoke many things to her. What they were I suppose it would be difficult for you or me to understand if we altogether knew. Peace and purity met together; righteousness and judgment kissed each other before the young girl's opening eyes. Yet she felt nothing of what we should distinguish as the sense of shame. At this period of her life, Nixy scarcely felt herself to be ashamed. She knew herself to be outcast, lonely; a creature of miserable yesterdays and more miserable to-morrows, — most miserable when the gray room had yielded her up to Thicket Street. She knew that her dress was dirty, and that there was

mud upon her feet. She felt that the delicate room was too fine for her. She folded away her dingy clothes with great care, lest they should stain the pearl-gray margins of the chair upon which she laid them. She crept timidly into the white bed; it seemed like creeping into a sunny snow-drift, as if the very breath of her own lips would melt it away from about her. She thought of Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle's attic, and of the bundle of straw in No. 19; wondered why Mrs. Purcell should have put "the likes of her" in such a bed, rather than bid her room with her servants.

Christina, at that very moment, was expending some wonder upon that identical subject; not suspecting, for her mother had not hinted them, the motives which influenced the mistress of the house in this perhaps extraordinary disposal of the poor little straggler. Whereas Mrs. Purcell's course of reasoning was simple enough. Ann, if she did make sour bread, and paste her four walls over with blessed gilt-paper Marys, was an honest woman. Knowing what she knew of poor Nixy, feeling as she felt herself to be the keeper of the maid-servant who was within her gates, Mrs. Purcell would have offered the out-

cast choice of all her pretty spare-rooms, would have bidden her, indeed, into her very own bed, rather than have imposed her presence upon the Irish girl. Here again was one of Margaret's "ideas."

Nixy, upon creeping under the fine gray counterpane, discovered, folded white across it, a wonderful garment, scented and soft, and heavy with delicate embroidery. It was, in fact, one of Christina's night-dresses ; and I am compelled to admit that it was her best one too.

"Why, how could you?" her mother, in real dismay, exclaimed when she found it out. To tell the truth, — and I propose always to tell the truth about Margaret, — Mrs. Purcell was for the instant shocked. That girl in Christina's clothes !

"Why not? Of course she had n't any with her, and I thought she'd like a pretty one while she was about it, you know. I did n't mean to do anything out of the way, I'm sure."

Christina stood with wide-open, lighted eyes. Of such as she had, she had given, on hospitable thought intent, to Nixy Trent, precisely as she would to Fanny Myrtle. She was so simple and

straightforward about it, and her mother was so annoyed, and ashamed of herself for being annoyed about it, that no more words passed between them on the subject, — as was generally the case when they differed. Only, said Mrs. Purcell, —

“She might have had one of mine, you know!”

Nixy, on seeing the delicate thing, had laid it away at first carefully, supposing only that Christina had left it there by some mistake; after a while it occurred to her that the young lady might by possibility have intended the garment for her use.

She unfolded, examined, refolded, placed it carefully upon the foot of the bed.

“It’s too grand for me,” she said.

This disappointed Christina. When her mother was “benevolent” she liked to “help,” in a pretty, childish fashion. It was altogether a pretty fashion, and not altogether a common one, in which Christina at that time blended in herself the child and the woman. As, for instance, this little incident of Nixy and the night-dress; ten years might have done the thing, thirty could not have done it on more advanced and consistent principle.



Let us smile, if we feel like it ; it may be a comfort to ourselves, it will be a harm to nobody ; but I venture to say that the time may—I do not assert that it will, but that it may—come when not to offer Nixy our best night-clothes would be as much of a departure from the ordinary customs of Christian society as it would be now to offer her a shroud. “Freely ye have received, freely give,” may have been spoken even touching embroidery and lace-work. Who knows?

Nixy, for very strangeness of comfort, lay waking much in the gray room that night.

There was a late moon, and the light, where it entered the room, was like the room,—all of shining gray. She thought, between her dreams, that she lay in a pearl and silver bath.

When she awoke in the morning, alone and still, in the clean room, in the clean sunlight,—  
“Mebbe God ’s got folks, after all,” she said in her heart. “Mebbe *she* ’s one,” meaning, of course, Margaret Purcell.

She felt glad to have found her, merely from a scientific point of view, even if, when found, the discovery must—as it must—mean nothing to her. She felt glad to have lived to sleep a night

in the gray room, though she went back to Thicket Street to-morrow. She wondered — this at intervals — what kind of a girl she, Nixy Trent, should now be, had she lived all her happy life in a pearly-gray room.

Christina broke upon the thought, in a morning-dress as fresh as her eyes, with a message from her mother, to the effect that Mrs. Purcell would like to inquire after the health of her guest to-day. And Nixy, scarcely hearing the message (though she afterwards recalled it, and thought it very odd), lifted her thoughtful eyes to the messenger, and wondered on : —

“Would I been like *that* ?”

*Would* she ? Who dares to say ?

Mrs. Purcell, asking herself the very question, through the first night and day that Nixy spent under her roof, did not dare. She looked from one girl to the other with a restless mouth. Out of the mouth the heart speaketh, and Margaret was restless in heart.

She had passed a disturbed night on account of this stranger who was beneath her roof ; she pitied her much, she dreaded her more. To have given her lodging, food, rest, advice, money, the

gray room, would not, or did not, satisfy the healthy conscience of this Christian woman. To take the trouble of providing the poor girl with such a home or such a "Retreat" as offers to Nixy's kind, promised to give her poor content.

These were the common humanities of life. A cultivated infidel (with a nice eye), like Sainte-Beuve, for instance, might far surpass them. Of Margaret Purcell, sitting down to darn stockings while Nixy was at breakfast, something finer than charity, something greater than philanthropy, it was reasonable to expect, it was — was it, or was it not? — right to demand; for Margaret Purcell was a Christian. The "All-Soul" tired her, it must be admitted, very much. "The powers of Nature, formerly called God," somehow or other seriously offended that measure of common sense of which, by man's inalienable "right to reason," she conceived herself to be possessed. She professed herself to be — and she had a native and emphatic fancy for being that which she professed — a disciple of a very plain and a very busy Man, who stopped, it has been said, of a certain summer night, weary

and dusty, and faint at heart, to make of himself a drawer of eternal water for a passing sinner's thirst.

Mrs. Purcell, darning her stocking, mused for a space upon this busy Man.

But had she not done already more than half the Christian women of her acquaintance would have done for that wretched girl? And should she be bound under obligations to do what none of the Christian women of her acquaintance — at least, none of whom she could think at that particular moment, which spoke the worse for either her acquaintance or her memory, of course — would do?

But Nixy's mute eyes pleaded, Give, give! There it was! She could not deny it. The Man who sat by the well expected more of her, expected much of her. He was not inconsiderate either. She had never known him unreasonable; she had never regretted a sacrifice made for one of his little ones.

In her simple life, with its simple burdens, simple blessings, — for so, as she grows older, she is fond of regarding what has often seemed a complex history to me, — in all this life her

allegiance to Him had returned to her what she estimated as a hundred-fold of wealth. Thus it had become — a very simple matter — her habit of life, no more to question a clearly expressed wish of his than to fight the sunlight. If he had called her, like Abraham of old, to cut Christina's throat, I believe she would have done it. She might feel very wicked about it for a week or so, before she made up her mind to do the deed, but she would have done it.

But *was* poor Nixy one of his little ones? Far be it from her to offend against Nixy then. To the half of her kingdom — for was not her home her kingdom? — would she offer her, if in thus doing she felt confident that she was about her Master's business. She said, over her stockings, Behold thy handmaid, — and would he do with Nixy according to his will?

After this she rolled the stockings up, and set her wits to work to discover what his will might be; meantime she said to Nixy, —

“Stay another day and rest.”

In the course of the day she sought the girl out, and asked a few questions to this effect:—

“No parents, you said?”

"No, ma'am. Never had none. There was the organ-grinder, and the woman as got drunk, and the woman as adopted me ; then the 'sylum and Jeb Smith, — that's where I tended table, — Jeb's, — and so, when I took sick, there was nobody that minded much but Lize ; and so you see there warn't nobody to take me in and help me bear what folks said. I always thought I'd kinder like to be a different girl, if I had anybody to help me bear what folks said. It's chances I come up country after. You have to have chances, — don't you see? Sometimes, when I'm layin' awake o' nights and thinkin' to myself, I seem to think as I should n't have ben like as I am, ma'am, if I'd had chances instead. That's what I thinks to myself last night, — begging your pardon for it ; but it come along of the grayness of the room."

Mrs. Purcell made no answer. There was a silence ; Nixy stood, through it, listless and pale. Mrs. Purcell broke it.

"You have not — I hardly know how to ask the question, for I do not like to insult you because you have sinned once — but —" she stopped.

“Ma’am!” Nixy looked puzzled, then flushed and paled.

“I’m not a wicked girl,” she said.

“She may or she may not be,” thought Mrs. Purcell. For what was the word of poor Nixy worth to a woman who knew as much as Margaret does of Nixy’s like? But what could one do? If there were but a germ of purity in the girl, how trample it by mistrust?

“What if this sinner strived, and none  
Of you believed her strife?”

“I would rather be deceived twenty times over,” said Margaret once to me, in speaking of this matter, “than to doubt one soul in which I should have confided. Cheated? Of course I get cheated! Who does n’t? But God knows it is hard enough for a poor sinner to trust himself, without all his fellow-sinners piling their mistrust across his way. Never was Christian laborer worse cheated, in the world’s eyes, than our Lord himself in Judas. You might as well put on gloves at a cotton-loom, as to be afraid of being cheated in the work of saving souls.”

So Mrs. Purcell, after a little thought, looked across her silence into Nixy’s young, unhappy eyes, and said, —

"Perhaps I cannot better beg your pardon, child, than by believing precisely what you say to me. Do you understand?"

Nixy understood, at least, that she was trusted. A falsehood in the light of a sin seldom presents itself to a Thicket Street girl's most vivid imagination. But partly from a keen sense of policy, and partly from a real though crude sense of honor, Nixy from that moment decided, in her own words, to "go it honest" with Mrs. Purcell, thinking, —

"She shall have all there is of me. 'T ain't no great. Pity to spoil it."

"So you would like" — Mrs. Purcell questioned — "you say you would like to live an honest life in an honest home?"

She had risen and stood now, taller than Nixy, looking down from her fine pure height upon the girl.

Said Nixy, looking up, "You bet!"

Mrs. Purcell actually started. The rough words fell from Nixy's lips as if they had dropped from the Mount of Transfiguration, for her face in the moment quivered, changed, flushed all over like a homesick child's, paled like a wasted prisoner's.



"She is starved!" cried Margaret to herself. "The girl is starved for the very crumbs that fall from her Father's table!" Aloud she said, —

"And the table is full, — full. God forgive us all!"

"I did not ask to sit at the table, ma'am," said Nixy, with some pride and much wonder.

"Go away now," Margaret made answer gently, — she was too much moved to smile, — "to-night again I shall like to talk a little with you, before — that is, if —"

As she did not finish, Nixy left her.

It took her, I believe, till night to finish the sentence.

"For there," said the mother in her, "is Christina!"

"Here," said the Christian in her, "is the Lord!"

Why not go about the Lord's business, and trust Christina to him?

But what was the Lord's business if not the soft shielding of Christina's eyes from the stains of the evil world?

But if Nixy *were* a "little one"? If, in the

girl's mute importunity, the very eyes of the Master pleaded to weary her? How fall upon her knees and say, "Here, Lord! I send her back to Thicket Street and sin. Am I my sister's keeper?"

Again, who knew what [taints of blood and brain] were lodged in the poor girl's growing life? Neither the Lord nor Margaret Purcell could bewilder the corrupt tree into bringing forth of healthy fruit. What if, after all the sacrifice, all the risk, all the possible mischief and misery of sheltering this stained thing in her pure home, the hidden serpent stung her in the bosom, — the girl betrayed, disgraced, dishonored her?

She might send her to the Home that intelligent Christian liberality had provided for her class. It was indeed one of the strong points in her maturer theories of usefulness to work, so far as might be, in the organized avenues of charity. There being a place for Nixy, — endowed, inspected, trustee, prayed for, — why not put her in her place? What business was it of *hers* to turn her individual house into a Magdalen Retreat? What then? If Nixy

went, — and Nixy would n't, — it would be only to await the welcome of just such a Christian household as her own.

But she might find some “pious and intelligent” family who would take in the girl. How? At the gain of her own personal relief; at the loss of her own personal chance of saving a most miserable little woman, whom to save would be — what would it *not* be of richness of privilege, of peace that passeth understanding? Margaret's earnest eyes filled with solemn tears.

But Margaret's practical heart went questioning on.

Why not find the girl an honest business and put her in it, and leave her — in a factory boarding-house, for instance? Poor Nixy! Thicket Street would wellnigh be as safe a shelter.

But a family without children; it was the Christian duty of such families — old, excellent, at the end of life, nothing else to do — to look up the Nixys of their time.

If *she* had no child — or a husband; if she had had anything that she did not have, or had not everything that she had, Nixy would have a claim upon her.

But that her white little daughter and that miserable girl — two mere children yet — should take hands and step on into their coming womanhood together !

Then, should Nixy be child or servant, or both ? Either was a wretched arrangement ; both, intolerable.

She would make heavy cake ; she would talk bad grammar ; she would eat with her knife ; she —

Margaret Purcell stopped here. She went away into her room, and fell upon her knees, and said, —

“ For Christ’s sake,” — this only, and this with a countenance awed, as if she too stood by the well in the dusk, and saw the thirsty woman and saw the wearied Man.

She came down to Christina, and said, —

“ We will keep the girl.”

But she gathered her daughter with a sudden sharp motion into her arms, kissed her once, kissed her many times.

“ My daughter, do you suppose that the time will ever come when — perhaps — you may not tell me — everything ? ”

"It never has," said Christina, gravely.

"You are growing up so fast!" mused Mrs. Purcell, in a disturbed voice.

She felt very vividly at that moment the fact which dawns so slowly and so painfully upon ever so wise a mother's comprehension, that her very own child, her flesh and blood, her life, her heart, — her soul, it had seemed, — is, after all, somebody else ; a creature with just as distinct a will and way and worth, with as independent moral risks and obligations, with as sharp a sense of character, and as sharp a mould cast by fate for the cooling of that character, as if she had never borne it upon her heart and carried it in her bosom. She felt, in the risks which she ran for Christina in this business of the girl, that Christina was fast coming to a point where she must run her own risks, and that was the sting of it. In her perplexity and pain it seemed to her that her arms were unclasping from the growing girl, that there was "*Nothing* all hers on this side heaven !"

Christina stood smiling by, like a star-flower. ✓

"When you were little I could command your confidence, you know," said her mother ; "as you

grow older I hope — that I shall be able, my dear, to win it."

"Why — yes," said Christina, only half understanding. "I am sure I would trust *you*, mother, twice as soon as I would trust myself!"

So Mrs. Purcell went to Nixy. "Very well," said Nixy, upon hearing her errand, which she took very quietly; "I'll serve you, ma'am, honest. I wanted honest work when I found the places and the folks. I didn't come to beg. If I thought you took me for a beggar I would rather not stay. But then perhaps God's folks —"

"What about 'God's folks'?"

"I don't know," said Nixy, slowly; "something as I can't get hold on. I s'pose you could get a sight better help nor me. But you don't treat me like a beggar, ma'am. It's something as I can't get hold on."

After a long pause she looked up; she had been sitting with her clouded eyes — it was well-nigh impossible to brighten Nixy's eyes — bent upon the pretty gray carpet, and said, —

"Perhaps I'd ought to thank you?"

Why, of course she ought! So, for the moment, Mrs. Purcell bluntly thought. Nixy had

taken her "charity" so much as a matter of course ; had so entirely failed to appreciate her "sacrifice" ; had accepted the results of her two days' striving with conscience and praying for light so simply ! The girl scarcely seemed to feel under "obligations," — assumed that she undertook the burden of her youth and misery and disgrace quite as a matter of individual privilege. Now, in theory, as we have seen, this was exactly what Mrs. Purcell did. Our theories are like our faces ; we never know what either looks like till we see its photograph. It struck Margaret — and Margaret was honest enough to see that it so struck her — as extraordinary that her own principles of conduct should return to her in such a very active shape. Was it not now "very odd" in "that kind of a girl" to receive her kindness as if — As if what ? As if she meant it, nothing more.

Mrs. Purcell's good sense rebounded quickly. She concluded, on reflection, that Nixy had rather honored her than otherwise. What, indeed, had the girl done but evolved "the situation," from her own crude conception of "God's folks" ? This thing which was finer than philanthropy, which

was greater than charity, in which kings and priests unto God have read dark riddles, little Nixy Trent—for not many mighty are called!—had put her stained finger trustfully upon. She had paid Margaret Purcell royal tribute.)

“I will put it,” said Margaret, with bowed head, “on usury for her.”



## CHAPTER IX.

## A LETTER.

“**A** CHRISTIANITY which cannot help men who are struggling from the bottom to the top of society needs another Christ to die for it.”

I find these words written on the package of Mrs. Purcell's letters and journals, to which, in the collection of material for Nixy Trent's story, I have had constant reference.

This leads me to note how naturally — indeed, how inevitably — Christianity and Margaret Purcell strike parallel thoughts in you. Religion with most people — I speak advisedly — religion with most people is an *appendage* to life. Margaret's religion is nothing less than life itself. It is not enough for her to rest in it, she “toils terribly” in it ; she does not gasp in it, she breathes in it ; she will only die in it, because that shall have become the last thing left to do for it.

I feel myself at times to be altogether incompetent to carry this tale with anything approaching to that degree of naturalness and vividness with which the tale was brought to me ; and this is one of the times.

I have not many letters in Margaret's hand, and so have treasured them. She takes a letter very much as people take typhoid fever, — yearly and thoroughly. She makes a business of it. A letter from Margaret is an epoch in history. There is about the difference between one of Margaret's letters and other people's notes that there is between Froude's England and Waterbabies.

The appended copy of one of these letters, though not, perhaps, as characteristic as some, is to the purpose just now, and here.

DEAR JANE BRIGGS :—

“And how, if it were lawful, I could pray for greater trouble, for the greater comfort's sake.” John Bunyan provided you and me with a morning's discussion when he said that. Do you remember? Because I am writing to you, and because Nixy sits studying beside me, are reasons

sufficient why I should recall the words on this particular occasion.

And so I made an affliction of that poor girl? Jane, I suppose I did! In my theory she was unbounded blessing! In my practice she was bitter burden?

Exactly.

Before I get to heaven, I hope that the Lord will give me time to become, not so much what I seem to other people,—which is of small account,—as what I seem to *myself* to be. “Men,” it has been said, “judge of our hearts by our words; God, of our words by our hearts”; “we,” it might have been added, “of both our words and hearts by our theories.” Jane Briggs! have a theory of suffrage if you like, of soft soap if you prefer, but have no theory of sin. There is one thing which I should like to be, whatever the necessary discipline of life thereunto required,—I should like to be an *honest* Christian; and I am urging now no higher motives than would induce me, if I had occasion, to be an honest grocer, doctor, lawyer,—merely the self-respect of the thing, you see.

All of which induces me to acknowledge that while I thanked the Lord for Nixy,—and I

believe I *did* thank him, — I took her at first very hard.

To begin with, she had lung fever.

Perhaps I should ask you, Will you hear of her? Christina will keep you informed of dentist's and doctor's bills, of her white flannel wrappers, — extravagant, but so pretty! and I think it works well for both the girls that Christina should wear white when she can just as well as not, — of the prices of beef and bombazine, of my new hall carpet and Dickens's "last," of fall sewing and Harmonicum concerts, of house-cleaning and the minister's salary, of preserves and prayer-meetings, of colds and chickens.

Will you have Nixy? If I had gone into the business of daguerreotyping for the rest of my life, the paper would have smelled of ether, and the pen would have told of silver-baths. As I have chosen the business of saving one wicked little girl from Thicket Street, are you prepared for the details of "the trade"? You demand "internal revenue"; can you bear with Nixy?

I bore with her at the first. I scarcely know now whether it is I who bear with her, or she who bears with me.

The business has become an exciting one, and my interest therein grows. The capital was small, and Heaven took the risks. The girl has been under my roof a year next week, and I am a rich woman on date.

But think of it, Jane! Lung fever! Right there in my pretty gray room! For I had not the time or the heart—I have forgotten which it was—to move her.

She had kept about the house very quietly and willingly, helping Ann, and just about half as much in the way as we expected; she must have kept up far beyond her strength, for she gave out one afternoon, as Ann succinctly expressed it, “all in a hape.” We found her crouched on the foot of the gray bed, scarlet and shivering, picking the counterpane with her little brown fingers.

“I tried,” she said, confusedly, “to get down and set the table, ma’am; I got to the head of the stairs three times, but I couldn’t get no further. Haven’t you got a poor-us anywheres near, as you could send me to be sick in? I can’t seem to get anywheres in the world that I don’t make trouble!”

Now, that did n’t make it any easier that she

should have lung fever in my gray room ; but it had the effect of mortifying me, which was something accomplished. I own I *was* mortified. For, at the moment, I had felt so aggrieved, afflicted, cross with the girl. Instead of going straight upon my knees to thank Heaven that it was n't small-pox !

Through her sickness — and she was very sick — I really think that I obtained some new conceptions of the healing department of our Lord's ministry. I wondered whether he never regarded it as a waste of his fine adaptedness to finer uses, that he should give hours, days, weeks, to that offensive branch of medical service, — the diseases of the poor ; whether the cripples and paralytics sickened him ; and how he bore with — fits, for instance.

I made some mention of the name of Christ, though not in this connection exactly, to Nixy, one day during her convalescence. I have forgotten what it was that I said, — something simple, for she was too sick to be exhorted, — but I remember perfectly her answer : —

“ Christ ? Jesus Christ ? That 's him they sang about in the 'sylum, and him they swears

by in Thicket Street. I always thought one of 'em was as much gas as the other. Did n't either of 'em make no odds to me. I never swore and I never sang."

"But you understood," I said, for I really did not know what to say, — "you understood that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners?"

"I'm not religious," said Nixy, wearily turning in bed.

From that day to this I have never "talked religion" to her. The only further remarks offered upon the subject that morning were made, after pauses, by her.

"Are *you* religious?"

"Perhaps you had better wait and find out for yourself whether I am or not. That will be fair to both of us."

"Mrs. Myrtle was," she said.

From which I inferred, what I have since learned, that Nixy had been in the service of Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle. You remember Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle?

With all respect for Mrs. Myrtle, — and I have considerable; she is generous with her money,

and useful in prominent charities, — I am glad that the Lord saved this little woman of ours for *me*.

As I believe I have given you to understand before, I have chosen yourself only as the sharer with me of Nixy's confidence. In this town and this house, no one but myself shall know, if I can prevent it, the history of the girl. In this house and in this town the girl shall command, if I can control it, the trust and the respect that are due to a spotless woman. I shall *assume* for her a clean place in the world through which I have undertaken to lead her. Whether I can gain it or not remains to be proved. When I look backward, my heart faileth ; when I look forward, fear taketh hold upon me.

At least, I do not *mean* ever to trip her by doubt of mine. What is gone is gone ; let the past bury its own for Nixy and me. Whatever is to be, I think, when I undertook the salvation of the girl, that I prepared myself intelligently for.

Meantime, I am awake at my post.

I am growing a little fond of this "burden" which I took upon my shoulders, — you could not help it yourself, Jane Briggs, — and I an-



ticipate, with much personal pain, the possibilities of a disclosure of her history to any one whose heart broods less tenderly or less thoughtfully than mine over her faults and her deserts. At present, beyond the vague opinion of my neighbors, that it was "very imprudent" in Mrs. Purcell to shelter the little wanderer who had been seen about our streets, no suspicion falls on Nixy. She troubles nobody; nobody troubles her. Faint gossip fades about her. She walks down street with Christina; respectable people salute her respectfully. Gower has doubts: "Is she adopted, — or what?" but Gower is courteous. Gower may be confused, but Gower will be well-bred. Heaven preserve Nixy from Gower, if what might be should ever be!

At present her life is still, and her life is growing. At present, as you perceive, I have hardly evolved her relations to me and mine from a chaos of sympathy, sickness, and self-depreciation.

For the fact is, Jane Briggs, that the more interesting this business of Nixy grows to me, the less interesting I am growing to myself; but of that another time.

I should have told you that the understanding

is exact between Nixy and myself on the subject of Christina.

It came about in this way. I hardly knew how to broach the subject delicately and suddenly, and broached I was determined that the subject should be before the girl had been twenty-four hours a "permanency" under my roof. As it chanced, on the very evening upon which I had decided to take her into my family, I came across her in the dining-room, where I had sent her to do some light work for Ann, standing at the window among my ivies, and looking, through the thick green curtain that they made, upon something in the yard below. The expression of her face attracted my notice, and I stopped.

Christina — in her white woollen, in the dropping dusk — was watering the geraniums below us. I should have liked to cast her, just as she stood, for a statue in a fancy fountain.

"You like the looks of her?" I said to Nixy.

"She's so white!" said the girl in a whisper.

"All the world is as white to her as her own dresses," I made answer, as gently as I knew how; "and I should like — that it should remain so as long as it can."

"*Ma'am?*" said Nixy.

She lifted to me, very pale from the tinting of the ivy greens, a thoroughly puzzled face.

"I mean that I would rather you should not tell my daughter — while you remain in my family — of what has happened to you."

"Oh!"

Her face dropped slowly.

"Yes, I understand. You would rather that she should n't know about all that. Very well. 'Tain't likely as I should have troubled the young lady, ma'am, if you had n't bid me not."

Christina, looking up, nodded and smiled at us through the delicate woven curtain that the ivies had swept between the two young girls.

Poor Nixy! To whom "all that" had been birthright and atmosphere! What was sin to Nixy? What was purity to Christina? Where did things begin and end? Who should say? How condemn or acquit? How revere or scorn?

Of the particulars of this girl's past life, concerning which you questioned me in your last, I have asked little and learned less. Indeed, there do not seem to be any particulars to

learn. She remembers very sketchily. She talks in outlines, vivid but crude. She seems not so much to have "taken life," as we say, hard or easily, purely or illy ; it is rather that life has taken her ; she dropped into it, drifted with it, like Constance, "all stereles, God wot." Sometimes, as I sit watching her overcast young face, wondering what transpires behind its muteness, wondering what ambuscades await its helplessness, the refrain of the old tale rings by me : —

"She dryveth forth upon our oceän."

God give the poor little sailor fair seas and pleasant harboring ! Who would not be cast "stereles" upon the "see of Grece," rather than upon the tides of Thicket Street ?

I have inquired once, and once only, of Nixy, concerning the father of her child. The result was such that I concluded, upon the spot, to let the whole painful matter drop forever. The simplicity and pathos of her story moved me much. A few words of it I saved for you, — the only words that I could well save.

"I saw him a little while ago. He said he was sorry. I told him he 'd ought to thought of that before."

To come back to the year's chronicle, — you know I never stay where I belong, — it was, perhaps, the lung fever which lost me a kitchen-maid, and gained me — what, exactly, whether pupil, child, friend, or all, or neither, time must prove.

At least, she was far too feeble to set at the wash-tub. And somehow or other, what with her pallor and my compassion, her quiet ways and my unquiet heart, she slipped out of bread-making into books. As I am so well used to the harness of teaching Christina, I have found it little extra trouble to overlook her studies. The result has surpassed my expectations. Nixy is no genius, but she is no dunce. She could teach a common school now, if it were a very common school, as well as half the district teachers in our neighborhood. And since I can afford, for the present, at least, and by means of a little contrivance, in which Christina generously joins me, — indeed, it was she who first proposed educating the girl, — to meet the expense of her few wants, I am well pleased that Nixy should “reform,” though I dislike the word, in my parlor rather than in my kitchen, in *my* personal atmosphere

rather than Biddy's. I should like, whatever may be the result, to be able to feel that I have done my *best* by her.

Just here I must admit that Nixy herself has surprised me in rendering my course of treatment a practicable one. I must admit that during the entire year, which she has spent under a supervision far more keen than she has ever suspected, I have not been able to lay my finger upon a thread of coarseness in that girl. (Thicket Street and sin seem to have slipped from her like pre-existence. I cannot *see* that a taint remains. I may be making a most egregious blunder, but, *until* I see it, tainted she shall not be to me or mine. Upon this I am determined. Other than this would seem to me like slamming the door of heaven upon a maimed soul just crawling in the crack.

"Go ye rather into the highways and hedges, and"—having found the halt—"compel them in."

She seems, as I study her from day to day, rather to have dropped in upon us and melted among us like a snow-drift, than like a dust-heap.

I was prepared for dust. I took hold of her with my eyes shut, to save the smart.

That seems now, you know, a great stupidity. Yet I am constantly recommitting it. You know me of old. I turn, like the sinner in the hymn-book, "in devious paths." I must feel my way, if I go at all.

For instance, she has on a pink bow this morning. Now, when one reflects upon it, there is no reason why Nixy should *not* wear a pink bow. The heart beneath it may be as white as a little nun's, for all the pinkness. Nixy Trent has undoubtedly the same moral right to pink ribbons as Christina Purcell, — who blushes all over with them this very morning, by the way, and sits in the window with a curve like a moss rosebud to her neck. It may be because I don't like to see the two girls wear the same thing, for which, again, I can plead no valid reason, but I *don't* like it. It annoys me ; Christina laughs at me for it, which is not soothing. Two or three times lately, Nixy has shown some faint awaking sense of girlish pleasure in girlish things ; has brightened in the eyes, in the voice, in motions, moods ; chatters with Christina, runs in and out, laughs about the house ; once she tried a feather upon her round straw hat ; she was pretty in it too,

which struck me for the moment as an impropriety, if you will believe it.

Why should n't she be as pretty as she can? — as pretty as *my* child, for instance? Why not wear feathers and ribbons? Who should laugh about a house if she should n't? Why am I not as glad of it at the instant as I become upon several hours' serious reflection?

"Go," said He who was wise in these matters, "and sin no more." Nixy went, and Nixy sinned no more, and Nixy is just sixteen. Shall I cork up all the sparkle of her new young life? Why *is* it — can you tell me? — that I should, on a species of stupid instinct, look more confidently for the salvation of the girl's soul if she wore brown dresses and green veils, and were the least bit uglier than she is?

Once, and once only, she asked me if she might have a white jacket like Christina's. I gave her a peremptory negative, for which I was afterwards very much ashamed; and she has never since alluded to the subject in any way.

This brings me to say a word or so, in closing, about the relation between the two girls. I have



left it till the last thing, because it is a subject upon which I feel some anxiety, but in regard to which I feel myself at my wits' end.

My daughter Christina has taken an astounding fancy to poor little Nixy Trent. I cannot shut my eyes to the fact, if I would. I am not at all sure that I would, — but there is the fact. It seems to have been, throughout, the most genuine, hearty, straightforward, natural thing; just Christina all over.

As I told you, of Nixy's history she knows nothing. As I told you, Nixy's conduct in this house has been as pure as her own.

I am convinced, that, in strict obedience to my commands, Christina has never investigated, Nixy has never revealed, the particulars of her life in Thicket Street.

She was a stranger, and I took her in, — that satisfied Christina. She is a good girl, and I am fond of her, — that is evident to Christina. She is not a servant. She sits in the parlor. She adds my accounts, which overpower Christina; she reads John Milton, of whom Christina stands very much in awe. She is very winning company, and Christina is very much alone. You

see? The consequence, whether inevitable or not, arrived.

I see the two girls arm in arm, hand in hand, in and out together, here and there, — like any other two girls.

The first time that I saw Christina kiss that girl, Jane Briggs, I believe I could have sent her back to Thicket Street without a spasm of compunction. If I had dared, I should have taken my daughter up stairs and washed her face.

I have become used to it now ; whether that is Christianity or stupidity, I am at loss at times to tell.

Sometimes, all that I feared for my own child, in the experiment of saving the child of sin, rushes over me with a sudden sense of terror that makes me fairly sick at heart. Sometimes, all that I hope for Nixy stands like an angel folding in my daughter with a mighty wing. Generally, my assurance that I have done the best I knew how for the Lord — and therefore for Christina and myself — keeps me still.

To be sure, if I have behaved like a fool, the Lord is not responsible for it ; but I am not as yet convinced that I have.

I believed, that, when Nixy entered my door, the Master without, in the dark, cried, "Open to Me." Thus believing, I have "experimented." Still so believing, I am prepared, if necessary, to run further risks.

One thing I should add : I told you that I had never "talked religion" to the girl. But one tries, you know, to live it. I fancy that Nixy has familiarized herself with it, in a certain way, as she has with fresh air and pictures. She breathes and watches. It has not perhaps struck her yet, that to be a Christian is so much an experience as an atmosphere. The lungs may move for years before we are conscious of possessing a windpipe. I enrich and purify the air for her as well as I may, and leave the Lord his own chances. Whether his coming be in the strong wind, or in the still, small voice, who knoweth? Nixy drinks him in, and grows.

I think I shall not entirely forget the words which this poor child so trustfully dropped of me, before ever she had tested what manner of woman I was. It would go hard with me to find that I had marred beyond restoration her simple fancy of the Lord's "folks." It would be rather nature

than grace, that she could *come at* him through me, and what he has empowered me to do for her. I would not so much deceive her as undeceive myself; not manage her, but be guided by her; *become* what she deems me, rather than tell her what I am not. Which is why I have found myself of late to be so uninteresting a study, as I hinted. Which is why I am in doubt whether it is I who bear with Nixy, or she who bears with me.

But what would happen to us all, if the Nixys of the world “comprehended” “God’s folks” as God’s folks, — whether justifiably or not, who can say? — fancy that they comprehend Nixy? But whatever I am to her it is time that I should be

Yours,

MARGARET PURCELL.

P. S. — Have I told you that I owe the only definite evidence of what we term “religious interest” in Nixy, to an old infidel Frenchman in Thicket Street? One Sunday night, Christina and I, with the guitar, singing “Depths of Mercy,” rather for ourselves than for her, were startled by a low exclamation from the girl’s corner, where

## *A Letter.*

she sat in the dark, listlessly listening; for never sings.

"I've heard that before," she said, with some emotion, checking herself because Christina was by; then gravely adding, "They are good words, and a good man sang them. Nobody ever taught me, but I knew they were good words. He was an old man, and kind to me; but he was not at all religious. I heard the song when I was—in great trouble. It helped to get me out,—though *I* was not religious either, and I see now that it is a very religious song. I wonder if Jacques knew that; for he was not religious, as I say."

Ah, these blind who lead the blind!

It amazes me to see how the Lord *uses* us, whether we will or no, for his own purposes; how he plans and counterplans, economizes, adapts, weaves the waste of one life into the wealth of another. In his great scheme of uses, it might be worth while that there should *be* an old Frenchman in Thicket Street, for the sake of that single strain of Christian song which Nixy's dumb life appropriated.

It may be a very foolish fancy (unless, as Mrs. Browning says, "Every wish is a prayer — with

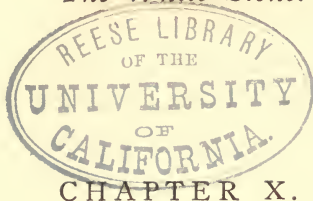
God”), but I have had the fancy more than once to wish, when we are singing on Sabbath nights, that old Monsieur Jacques may learn before he dies, for Nixy’s sake, to see other meanings to the hymn than the beat of an excellent guitar-waltz.

We sing the hymn to her every Sunday. She asks for it, but never comments upon it.

I believe, Jane Briggs, that I would rather be the author of one good hymn than of anything else in this world, unless it were sunshine.

There is just room left for what I had nearly forgotten to say, — that my rheumatic afflictions increase, to the weariness of my soul. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is particularly weak in view of the invalid old age which is likely to be my destiny. One had so much rather screw out like an astral than flicker out like a candle.

Apropos of this, we have a new physician in this place : Burtis, by name, — from town, I believe, — and learned in the “Latin parts” of his profession. A good thing. There was sore need of him. I shall feel safer about the girls.



THE WHITE STONE.

“**B**UT my *dear* Mrs. Purcell!”

My dear Mrs. Purcell smiled.

One well acquainted with Mrs. Purcell would have inferred her visitor from her smile. I can scarcely believe that any other than Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle could receive from Margaret the benefit of that particular smile.

That Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle should happen to be a visitor in Gower on the summer month which dates these notes of the fact (a date four years older, I believe, than that of Margaret's letter) was natural. That she should chance to be making an afternoon call upon Mrs. Purcell was not extraordinary. That, having been driven by Boggs directly past the new grammar school of Gower, to see the building, and this at the hour of the grammar school's dismissal, she should have met and recognized the new

teacher, Miss Trent, was rather a logical sequence than an accident.

That the first person with whom she should consequently have conversed, after the occurrence of these incidents, was Mrs. Purcell, may have been, for the grammar teacher, not unfortunate.

So said Mrs. Myrtle, leaning back in a seriously depressed though very graceful attitude, in (what if she had known it!) — in Nixy's favorite arm-chair by Nixy's favorite window, —

“My DEAR Mrs. Purcell!”

Mrs. Purcell, through her smile, called and sent Christina to keep Nixy out of the way.

“I think,” said Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle, without a smile, “that I was never quite so much taken by surprise in the course of my life.”

“Very likely,” Margaret made quiet reply. “I suppose that your surprise would not be unusual in any one with your command of Nixy Trent's past, and without my confidence in her future.”

“I cannot understand how such a girl,” urged Mrs. Myrtle, with a certain kind of gentle sadness in her voice, such as Margaret had noticed



that Mrs. Myrtle's voice generally acquired in addressing "such girls" at the Home, — "I cannot understand how you dared to receive such a girl into your family, — and on such very peculiar, though very Christian, terms, — and you the mother of so innocent and lovely a child as your Christina. I beg your pardon if I am impertinent, Mrs. Purcell, but I *am* perplexed. I should like to know, from the Christian point of view, however beautiful and interesting a thing it was to do, — and I envy you the opportunities, I assure you, — how you *dared*."

"I dared *because* Christina was 'innocent and lovely,' and *because* I was her mother. Perhaps, too, partly *because* it was a 'beautiful and Christian thing to do!'" said Margaret, in a ringing voice. It seemed to her like stepping from a sanctuary into a battle-ground, to see her own old long-dead doubts and struggles diluted in Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle's "depressing" atmosphere.

It was so long then since poor little Nixy had been anything other than Mrs. Purcell's trusted friend, child, treasure, — whatever it was! She never knew. She knew only that her visitor's chatter struck very near a very quiet and long

quiet heart, that had folded the erring child, a pure woman, into its growing love and growing need. Perhaps it was because she was becoming "sick and old," as people said, that she had of late troubled herself so little about Nixy; had feared so little for her or for herself; had so little memory of her yesterday, so little of the old fear for her to-morrow. Or it may have been because Nixy had ceased to talk bad grammar; never ate with her knife now; enticed Christina through the "Excursion"; never wore pink bows; had "joined the church," and seldom, if ever, mentioned Thicket Street. Margaret was not stupid, but Margaret, as I said, was sick. Little things had given her great quiet for Nixy. A little thing—even Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle—now alarmed and jarred upon her.

"But Christina was so very young," urged Mrs. Myrtle, "so near, I should fancy, the age of the other girl,—I think she told me she was fifteen when she was in my service,—and how could you know—"

"I should not know much if I did not know enough to trust my own influence over my own daughter," said Margaret, with compressed lips.

She wondered at that moment if she could ever have lain awake two nights, trying to decide whether Nixy would injure Christina. She would as soon think now of Christina's injuring Nixy. She was inclined for the moment—but the moment only, as was the way with Margaret—to feel as if Mrs. Myrtle had insulted her common sense. So fast we throw away the “stepping-stones” when we have climbed up and over “our dead selves”!

“But there are so many sacred and superior claims,” argued Mrs. Myrtle, “that *I* could not feel it to be my duty to run the risk, which you, my dear Mrs. Purcell, ran, with this unfortunate girl. My field of usefulness, as the mother of my Fanny, is necessarily so very much in the—what might be called the domestic affections. It was a depressing circumstance that I was obliged to dismiss the girl from my service as I did. I took pains to keep my servants in ignorance of the details of the affair, and, with the exception of Mr. Myrtle and a few very particular friends, I have been careful not to mention it. But I little thought ever to see Nixy Trent teaching a grammar school!”

From which one might have inferred that *if* Mrs. Myrtle had ever thought to see Nixy Trent teaching a grammar school, she would have made a particular effort to mention it.

"Nixy is considered, in my family and this town, to be an unspotted woman —" began Margaret.

Mrs. Myrtle interrupted softly : —

"Does that never strike you as at all deceitful?"

"Nixy's character here," repeated Mrs. Purcell, with unusual brusqueness, "is as high as yours or mine, Mrs. Myrtle!"

"You shock me, Mrs. Purcell!" said Mrs. Myrtle. Mrs. Myrtle looked, in fact, shocked.

"Perhaps I am rude," said Margaret, with heightened color and quivering voice, "but I have shielded Nixy like my own child so far, — and gossip —"

"Mrs. Purcell," said Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle, politely, — very politely, — "I think you have quite misunderstood and misappreciated me. *I* never gossip. *I* have no wish to injure the girl. What do you take me for? Do you suppose that my Christian sympathies with that erring class are

less quick than your own? Providence threw into *your* way chances of usefulness never granted to *me* in my confined sphere of action."

Mrs. Myrtle put her handkerchief to her eyes. Her polite voice ruffled. She looked sincerely distressed. Her bonnet-strings glittered with two sincere tears.

"You depress me so, Mrs. Purcell!" she exclaimed, in a broken, honest fashion, as Margaret, silent, sat and wondered what she was expected to say. "I cannot understand why it is. Aspirations—I *have* my aspirations, Mrs. Purcell, though it is seldom that I touch upon them in this confidential manner—aspirations after activity and sacrifice, and all that is Christian and beautiful, which I find impossible to realize, you make no more fuss over than you would over a tea-party. You impress me as a kind—of—military spirit, Mrs. Purcell; really quite a romantic kind of military character. There is such a *nonchalance*—*esprit*—daring way to you. Now I was n't *made* to dare. It never would work with Mr. Myrtle and the children. It never would work in society. And there *are* claims—I do not know how it happens, but I find you the most depressing person I know!"

"Then call again — do!" urged Margaret. She did not mean to be sarcastic; intended to be hospitable only; feeling wellnigh as uncomfortable as her visitor. I think she was thenceforward rather inclined to thank Heaven that Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle had not made a *protégé* of Nixy, than to consider Mrs. Myrtle as accountable to Heaven for turning Nixy from her doors.

"I do not mean to be uncharitable," she said, in parting from her visitor upon the piazza. Whether she meant it or not, Margaret felt that she had not "borne all things, hoped all things, suffered long," with Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle. It is far easier for a woman like Margaret Purcell to apply the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians to the Nixy rather than to the Mrs. Myrtle of society. The only difference in that respect between Margaret and other people is, that Margaret was keenly conscious of a failing, where most of us would be blindly elevated by a sense of particular virtue. Christian liberality falls so much more gracefully than it irrigates or climbs. It is so much less difficult to condescend to an inferior than to be generous to an equal or a superior. The ideal charity is that

rare and large thing which is at ease and is at work up and down and around itself. It is, in fact, an atmosphere rather than an avenue.

“I should not wish,” said Mrs. Purcell, thoughtfully, “to judge narrowly in this matter. Everybody could not pick a girl up from the streets and put her into the parlor, — if every girl could go. It may be that you, Mrs. Myrtle, in keeping Nixy in your kitchen, would have made more of a Christian sacrifice than have I in dealing as I have seen fit to deal with her. It is more likely to be, as you observe, ‘best for Fanny’ that you dismissed her entirely from your house. I pray you to understand that I climb the Judgment Seat for nobody. I do claim, however, that if I chose to make a crowned princess out of Nixy Trent, it would be nobody’s business but my Master’s. And I demand, for myself and for Nixy, the respect and the assistance — I will not have the tolerance and suspicion — of the Christian society in which I move. I may fail to obtain it, but I require it in the name of the Lord Christ, — to whom, Mrs. Myrtle, the girl would have gone from Thicket Street far more trustfully than ever she came to you or me, — and

you and I are women, and her sisters, and her fellow-sinners, Heaven forgive us !”

Margaret, with feverish color and disturbed eyes, sat in one of the piazza chairs as Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle rode out of the yard ; and the grammar teacher — so little like Mrs. Myrtle’s quondam nursery-maid that afternoon, that Boggs, duller than his mistress, was seen to tip his hat as he yielded her the road — the grammar teacher, a little pale, a little startled, perhaps, came in.

Two or three of her scholars had been clinging about her. The children were fond of her, — very. She had been with them now a year, “growing,” as Margaret had written me, “into the idea of self-support as she grew into that of self-respect ; and since she is quite competent for the undertaking, I should have considered it a great mistake to discourage it ; not because she sprung from what, with a stupid sarcasm of ourselves, we are fond of terming ‘the laboring classes,’ but precisely as I should encourage it in Jane Briggs, Christina, Fanny Myrtle.”

Miss Trent, as I was saying, hurriedly dispersed these children on meeting with Mrs.



Myrtle's carriage, and hurriedly stepped up the walk, and, without any remarks whatsoever, sat down on the piazza at Mrs. Purcell's feet.

Four years of purity and Margaret Purcell had done something for little Nixy Trent.

A little of her old fancy about dropping Christina "like a cloud" into Thicket Street might have struck one of the Thicket Street girls herself, sitting there that afternoon at Margaret's feet. One would have liked, just for the artistic experiment of it, to try the effect of her in No. 19, at Jeb's, at Monsieur Jacques's, in the sharp shadow where the chickweed grew, and Moll from the dark looked out at her.

Now, these had been four very quiet, ordinary years, not of the kind which work wonders upon people, not of a kind to have worked wonders upon Nixy ; and she had consequently developed in those respects to which the culture of quiet is especially adapted ; had rested, dreamed, refined ; fused the elements of a character rather about ready for casting than ready for finish. Poor Nixy's life was one of those which bud so late that a hot-house pressure may be needed to save

it from wan, frost-bitten blossoms. And what pretty thing is sadder than a frosty flower?

In other words, Nixy had rather grown than matured, had not become apt in analyzing herself or other people; had not, as we say, "put this and that together." Life in Thicket Street was a hideous dream. Life in Gower was a slow, sweet waking. If ever she reasoned far about either, — perhaps she had, — it was in a very sleepy or a very secret way. Margaret felt oppressed sometimes with her, as if by electricity in the air; it seemed as if something in her must snap before long; as if, in some manner, the girl's life had got upon the wrong tension. This uncertain development was the more noticeable in contrast with Christina, — a creature so healthy, happy, fitted, and fine! — symmetrical as the moon, and as conscious of being where she belonged.

"Things have always come at you," said Nixy, one day, vaguely feeling after this idea; "I have always had to come at things."

It seemed to Nixy natural enough, for Margaret had taken pains that it should so seem, that Mrs. Purcell should have admitted her into

her home ; lung fever into the parlor ; time into Mrs. Purcell's heart ; human nature into Christina's ; the love of God into "religion," and Mr. Hobbs (for it was Mr. Hobbs) into the grammar school. Yet the growing woman was really in a very unnatural niche in life, and Margaret scarce knew whether she would most wish that she should or should not find this out.

For instance, Margaret, just because she loved Nixy, and just because she trusted her, regretted at times that the girl seemed — as she did — so unconscious or regardless of the fact that she had not always been worthy of love and trust. In anybody else, she would have said that this argued callousness or dulness. At other times she doubted if Nixy were either unconscious or regardless.

She doubted somewhat when Nixy sat down at her feet upon the piazza. She scrutinized her keenly.

Nixy sat remarkably still. Shadows from hop-vines on the trellis — the prettiest shadows in the world are made by hop-vines, and Margaret runs her doors over with them — fell upon her hands, and her hands moved as the shadows

moved ; otherwise she was uncommonly still. Mrs. Purcell thought, as she watched her face, turned a little, and with the hair dropped, how fair and fine a face it was ; how womanly and worthy ; how rich in possibilities that life would never bring to it ; how unmarred by the dark certainties that life had brought.

What is sin ? she thought. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone ; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

Now this was not theology, but thankfulness ; and, to prove to Margaret that it will never do to be even thankful untheologically, Nixy at that instant lifted her eyes, — her eyes for a year past had been like breaking clouds ; sun, moon, and stars were darkened in them just then, — and said, —

“ I suppose I shall never get away from it.”

“ Away from what ? ”

“ The — sin.”

Nixy spoke very slowly and solemnly.

Margaret could not have been taken more thoroughly off her guard if a new-born baby had opened its mouth before her and talked of total depravity and confessed original sin. But all the reply that she made was, —

“You met Christina?” — this to give herself time.

“I went to walk with her — yes ; but I had the children, and the doctor overtook us, so I hurried on.”

“The doctor agrees with you about the examination business?”

“Fortunately, considering he is chairman of the committee ; but I had got through all I had to say about that. I was not rude to him, I believe.”

Nixy never was exactly rude to Dr. Burtis, but she was always ill at ease with him, — always had been since, being summoned for the first time professionally to Mrs. Purcell’s house, to manage some slight indisposition of Christina’s, he had come suddenly upon her sitting by Christina’s sofa, with Christina’s head — such a moulded, fine young head — on the little outcast’s shoulder.

They had looked each other in the face, but neither had spoken.

“My friend, Miss Trent,” said Mrs. Purcell, coming in.

Dr. Dyke Burtis gravely bowed to Miss Trent. Of how near he had been to sending Miss

Trent to the 'sylum where he had sent Ann Peters, he gave from that hour, in Mrs. Purcell's family, no sign. Most men would have felt it, perhaps, to be "a duty." For what did Mrs. Purcell know—how much, and how little—of Thicket Street Nix? And what of the starry-eyed girl with her head upon Nixy's shoulder? Dyke Burtis, after a keen look at the faces of the three women, had concluded that all this was none of his business, and had kept his own counsel.

Nixy, to spare Mrs. Purcell the pain of dwelling upon a painful matter, kept hers.

So the physician, in and out, as Margaret and her growing invalidism fell under his frequent care, came and went, and gravely smiled or spoke or referred or deferred to the little castaway of Thicket Street; and Nixy, shrinking through her silence, suffered many things because of him. This was not for her own, but for Christina's sake. It cut her with a hurt that was slow in healing to be reminded of Thicket Street with Christina by.

Long after, when, both for her own and another's sake, the fulness of time had come, she

opened her lips, and the sacredness with which Dyke Burtis had kept an outcast's confidence was treasured among those "ways" which commanded for the little doctor with the streaked beard a somewhat singularly tenacious affection or repugnance.

"Mrs. Myrtle—" began Margaret, abruptly, when Nixy, after her allusion to the physician, paused.

But Christina came in, flushed and lovely, bounding up the walk; the doctor at the gate touched his hat, and walked with ringing steps away.

"It sounds like a march to battle!" said Christina, pausing with bent head to listen to the doctor's tread. She so liked healthy, happy, resolute things! And she had such a healthy, happy, resolute way of owning it!

Margaret, so thinking, glanced from her daughter's pretty, pleased, expectant attitude to Nixy, who was still extremely pale, and who had moved, at Christina's coming, slowly and lifelessly away into the garden-walk.

"Nixy cross?" pouted Christina, and, springing after her, — into a shimmer of tall white lilies, —

she put both arms about her neck and kissed her. Margaret observed that Nixy stood still, and did not return the caress, and that Christina, puzzled and pained, walked back, and left her standing alone among the bruised white flowers.

The interruption perhaps did no harm. Margaret was prepared, when she and Nixy were at last alone and undisturbed together, which was not till after supper, to come at once to the point from which she should have started. She did this abruptly enough.

"Mrs. Myrtle will tell nothing, Nixy. She is not bad-hearted."

"That does n't so much matter," said Nixy, slowly.

"What *does* matter then?"

Margaret spoke more quickly than gently. She was perplexed, and her head ached.

"I don't think I — can exactly — tell," said Nixy, in a low voice.

"Mrs. Myrtle has frightened you, Nixy!"

"I suppose so."

"Not because you thought she would gossip about you?"

"I think not."



"I don't understand, then, what the trouble is."

But she did, undoubtedly.

Nixy made no reply. Mrs. Purcell got up and paced the room a little, after her old fashion. It was long since she had exhibited so much disturbance over Nixy. Nixy sat, as she had sat upon the piazza, uncommonly still.

Margaret, pacing the room, was undecided whether to cry over her or shake her. In the darkening air, Nixy's dawning sense of shame rose like a mist between the two, and chilled her to the heart. With a curious inconsistency, Mrs. Purcell — perhaps because her head ached — felt now like checking the very germ for the growth of which she had with anxiety watched. Nixy had been wicked ; Nixy ought to feel that she had been wicked. But Nixy was good, and — and, as nearly as she could come at it, Nixy ought to feel too good to feel wicked. Why rake over dead ashes for the sake of making a little dust? There was pure fire upon the altar now, and the steps thereto were swept and garished.

Mrs. Purcell would have liked to send Nixy

off to play, like a child, and bid her forget that she had been a naughty girl.

This was partly, perhaps, cowardice, for she was fond of Nixy ; partly headache, as I observed ; wholly, whether of headache or of fondness, conquered before she had crossed the room half a dozen times, and had sat down in the gathering dusk, and had bidden Nixy, by a silent gesture, to the cricket at her feet.

Nixy was not a child. She could not be sent to play. There was work before her. Margaret thought how terrible was the work of escaping even a forgiven sin. Were there never to be play-days again for Nixy ? When she looked, through that rising mist that had chilled all the air between them, at the young girl's contracted face, her heart sank within her. Poor Nixy !

She must have said "Poor Nixy !" aloud, for Nixy turned.

"It was for *you* that I minded," she drearily said. "It came over me — all in a minute — when I saw her — when I saw Mrs. Myrtle — that people would know — and Christina ; and that —"

"Tell me," said Margaret, "what came over you?"

"That I was n't like — you ; like — Christina. That there was something forever and forever that people must not know ! That I was forever and forever to be — ashamed. All at once !" said Nixy, hoarsely. "All before I had time to bear it, — and then I did n't care for Mrs. Myrtle or for all the world ; but I understood what I had never understood before. I understood that I was ashamed — ashamed !"

The young girl stretched her hands out into the dark, and wrung them bitterly.

"How can *you* know?" she cried out. "I was a child. You took me and loved me. I was good. I was happy. I forgot. Sometimes I thought. Sometimes, when Christina kissed me, I was cold, and I was afraid. Sometimes, since I have taught the little children, I have thought of — of — I have remembered that —"

She bowed her head and dryly sobbed.

"All the year I suppose it has been growing, — coming. But all in a minute I understood ! How can *you* understand ? You made me so happy ! You made me so safe, so good ! I was

a child, and I came from Thicket Street, — and I tell you that they do not understand in Thicket Street how to be ashamed !”

“ I was so young — I had no mother —  
God forgot me — and I fell,”

thought Margaret. Her hot tears fell on Nixy's face. She put her arm around her ; she stooped and kissed her, she felt that she had no other speech nor language for her.

But Nixy looked up as one who stood afar off, and said, —

“ I am ashamed — ashamed !”

“ I am not ashamed of you !” cried Margaret, impetuously ; but Nixy shook her head.

“ I sinned,” she said, — “ and I am ashamed !”

Margaret felt as if some one had stricken down her strong right arm. Nixy seemed in an hour to have grown away, out of, beyond her tenderest touch.

“ God help her !” she said, and fell, by an instinct, upon her knees.

I have been told that she broke at once into vehement prayer. This was remarkable, not as a fact, but because Margaret did it. She was not one of those Christians to whom prayer in the

presence of others is an easy, even a possible thing. She never prayed with the sick, the dying, the poor. Tracts, jelly, Bibles, flannels, were distributed prayerless from her comforting hand. Her own child had scarcely, since she was a child, heard her lift up her voice before the Lord. This may have been unfortunate, — Margaret, like others of the “voiceless,” had mourned much in secret over it, — but so it had been.

For the little castaway, bowed to the ground before her with shame and sorrow, the sealed fountain broke, and Nixy — for the first time and the last — sat hushed, in the presence of her supplicating voice, —

“Friend of sinners!” said Margaret, weeping much, “we are in the dark, and bewildered and sick at heart. Sin hunts us out and chases us about, and stares at us, and we are ashamed and sorry; but there is no help in shame and no relief in being sorry. We are guilty before thee, and stained. Wherever we turn our faces or lift our hands, we are hedged about. There is no breath left in us, and we stifle! Be thou breath, freedom, walking-space before us! Take the

hand of this poor child of thine, — see, Lord! I hold it up! It drops from mine; strength is gone out of me. Hold it, and lead her. Surely thou wilt not keep her sorry overmuch? She was so young, dear Lord, and no man cared for her soul. Dost thou not feel her young tears upon thy bruised feet? Is there nothing in all thy love — for thou art rich, and we are bold in begging — to bid her smile again? Hast thou no promise — for thy promises are many, and we cannot afford to overlook even a little one — for a sinner who is ashamed? Wilt thou give her everything else and forbid her self-respect? . . . .

“Lord! thou art here before us; and thine answer comes. Gather the poor little girl in thine arms and tell her — for I cannot tell her — that she shall not be ashamed of herself, for thou art not ashamed of *her*; that she shall respect herself, for thou hast had respect unto *her*; that she shall honor herself, for the Lord God Almighty honors *her*, — for the sake of Christ our Saviour.”

“I wonder,” said Margaret, as they sat in the

dark, long silent, "I have often wondered, and meant to ask you, about your name. Nixy must be a corruption of something."

She spoke idly enough, thinking only to divert Nixy a little from the effects of a very painful evening ; but the words struck Nixy with a sharp significance. "A corruption of something." Had not her whole life been a corruption of something ?

"I believe the name was Eunice," she sadly said.

"Eunice ! A pretty name. It has a soft, fine strain in it, like some of Mendelssohn's songs, — Eunice. Why did I never call you Eunice ?"

"Because I was not soft and fine," said poor Nixy.

"'As a prince hast thou had power with God and hast prevailed. Thy name shall be no more Jacob, but Israel,'" Margaret made answer. "Kiss me, Eunice !"

She smiled and patted her soft hair. Nixy tried to smile, but the face which she lifted for Eunice's first kiss was solemn. It seemed like a baptismal blessing to her.

“Soft and fine — like Mendelssohn’s songs. Eunice — Eunice!”

The poor girl said it over — and choked.

“You ’ll remember — everything, and call me — that?”

“I can remember everything, and call you all of that,” said Margaret, grown very solemn too. For she thought, What is one flaw on Carrara? The hand of the artist can mend what accident marred. There is a statue in the master’s curtained studio. There is another at the street corner. But a block of marble will make the two, — and there’s the marble, after all. Something of this she said or looked.

Perhaps Eunice did not quite understand it; but she crept away like a hushed child into the gray room to think it over.

It was late; Christina had gone to bed, the house was still; a tardy moon rose as it had risen on the first night that she had spent within the delicate gray walls. There fell, as there had fallen before, a bath of pearly mist into the middle of the quiet room.

The young girl, after a little hesitation, undressed, crept into her night-clothes — fine and



soft as Christina's now — and kneeled down in the shining bath. She folded her hands and her face dropped. She spoke aloud to herself, —

“Eunice — Eunice!”

She forgot, for the moment, and in the sparkle of the silver bath, that she was ashamed.

She thought of a thing which she had read about “a white stone, and in the stone a new name written. Which no man knoweth” — so it was said — “saving he that receiveth it.”

She felt for the book and the page in the half-light, opened at the opulent, reticent words. Commentators and theologians have peered vaguely at their “metaphorical construction.” Sophists and mystics have dreamed vain dreams across them. To this young girl they shone like the moonlight in which she knelt, and rang like the voice which said, Go, but go in peace.

## CHAPTER XI.

## WHICH TREATS OF A PANORAMA.

CERTAIN marked changes fell, about this time, upon Eunice Trent. With some of these Margaret found herself pleased, by others saddened, by others perplexed ; all of them were natural.

For example, she took a fancy for the wearing of black ; even her still gray school dress slipped off from her after a while. The children asked her once if she were in mourning.

“ Yes,” she said.

“ Is this best ? ” asked Margaret.

“ I am comfortable so,” Eunice replied.

“ Eunice, look there ! ”

A gorgeous October sun chanced at that moment to be dropping over a certain purple hill which peeps over Mrs. Purcell’s garden grounds into the western windows of the house. An old burial-ground — Gower’s oldest — dotted the



slope and crowned the ascent, and, as Margaret spoke, the ancient stones had entrapped the wealth of the late color in broken but brilliant masses. The headstones looked rather like jewels than marble. Shrubs and grass and sky were shining. The clouds rained color. There was a shower of lights.

"God paints the graves of things," said Margaret, earnestly.

"Not murdered things," said Eunice, very low. "Do you mind? I will not wear black dresses if you mind; but I am comfortable so."

Margaret said nothing, and the subject dropped there, finally, between them.

The color indeed suited Eunice, or Eunice suited the color. Perhaps the girl was morbid, sentimental, in the choice of it; for nothing is in more danger of sentimentality than penitence. The maturing woman at least cooled in it like a mould. Those who best knew and loved Eunice Trent have, I think, always called her in her graver years a beautiful woman. This beauty was of a peculiar kind; forever a prisoned, waiting, indefinable thing, as sad as the beauty of a dead child, as appealing too, and as holy. The sadness grew with the holiness of it.

The sadness grew rapidly at the time of which I write. Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle was a little fire, but she had kindled a great matter.

Did Eunice live in fear of her? In fear of detection? In dread of public shame? In dread of seeing the stars go out in Christina's eyes? Was her mute sorrow a terror or a conviction? a mood or a purpose? Margaret wondered much.

Eunice, as usual, surprised her. As usual, she disturbed her before she pleased her.

"I have been thinking," she said one day, with great abruptness, "whether I ought not—whether perhaps I should not go and hunt it up."

"Hunt it up?"

"The child."

Margaret's rocking-chair stopped sharply.

For years Eunice had not mentioned him. She hoped—I think she hoped—that Eunice had forgotten him.

"Of course not!" she said, quickly,— "of course not! What induced you to think of such a thing?"

Eunice sadly smiled.

"I have thought very much of it for a very long time. If I had been—that is, if I had had

no one but myself to consider, I should have tried before this to find the little thing."

"Eunice," said Mrs. Purcell, "you are growing fearfully morbid!" Eunice was silent.

"Or else," added Margaret slowly, and after a pause, in which her sharp rocking indicated the sharpness of her mood, — "or else you are growing as healthy as the Gospel of John, and as brave; and it is I who am sick and a coward. I wonder what Christina would say!"

Eunice shrank.

"Christina loves me," she said, in a scarcely audible whisper. "Christina never knew, never guessed. Poor Christina!"

"Are you in pain?" asked Mrs. Purcell, suddenly. Eunice had a pinched, white look about the mouth that alarmed her.

"No, — O no."

She took up her sewing, and her needle flew nervously in and out.

"Christina has never questioned you about your former life?" asked Mrs. Purcell more softly.

"Never once."

"You are quite sure that she has never — suspected?"

"She loves me!" said Eunice. "She could never have loved me and — suspected. Poor Christina! Poor Christina!"

"Do you love the child?" asked Mrs. Purcell, suddenly.

"No," said Eunice, quietly.

"You have no maternal longings for it?"

"No."

"You have no desire to see it — fondle it?"

Eunice shrank again all over, in that peculiar fashion of hers, like the sensitive-plant.

"The child was not to blame —" She remembered, as she spoke, how sternly these words had dropped from the stern lips of old Lize in No. 19. The miserable bed, the murder-stain upon the miserable wall, the miserable sights and sounds that had ushered her miserable infant into life, stood out like a stereoscopic picture against her lightened life, and turned her for the moment faint and sick. So perhaps — who knows? — a soul in paradise may cower at permitted times over permitted memories of earth.

"The child was not to blame," said Eunice. "That is all. I do not care for him, but I presume God does. I am his mother. Nothing can help that. I should not want to die and be asked, Where is the baby? Should you?"

"I do not know," said Mrs. Purcell. She felt that the outcast was growing beyond her guiding hand. In moods, she felt like sitting at her feet to learn of her.

"Let us think this through," she said. "If it were not for Christina —"

"If it were not for Christina, I should own and rear my child," Eunice, in a suppressed but decided voice, replied. "If it were not for Christina, I — think — that I could bear it, that the rest of the world should know that I am the mother of a child. I do not think people would be very cruel to us. Do you think they would? At least there would be good people, Christian people, — people who *could* not be *cruel* to us — the child and me — for Christ's sake."

Mrs. Purcell remained silent. She did not know how to tell her how cruel Christian people can be.

Her silence ended the conversation, and the subject was not renewed for many days.

The way for its renewal was paved at last in an unexpected manner.

It happened to Eunice, on a certain day in frosty mid-autumn weather, to be detained at the grammar school by a headache, — one of her blind headaches, a frequent ailment of hers at that time, — overwork only, Dr. Burtis thought, unless, perhaps, some slight defect in the circulation about the heart. The trouble, though simple, was confusing in its effects. Christina had seen her stagger with pain once or twice in the streets, and was apt to call at the school-house to help her home.

On this particular day she was late, and Eunice sat dizzily waiting alone in the school-room, stupidly watching for her through the window, and stupidly following the stupid course of a panorama company outside in a little blue cart, about which all the children had gathered, and were shouting. She was too sick to think much or clearly. She sat — very lovely and very still — with her head upon her crossed arms, and her soft hair loosened against her cheek ; per-



haps a more delicate sight for being ill, but a delicate, fine sight in any event, — fine as the chasing twilight, and as mute.

She was wondering brokenly if that were Christina at the bend of the road, and why the little blue cart should stop so long in front of the school-house door, and whether the panorama were anything that the children's mothers would rather they would not see, thinking to go and find out, and thinking that she was quite unable to stir, when the creaking of the door disturbed her and a heavy step tramped up to the desk, —

“Is this the school-marm?”

Something in the powerful, monotonous tones startled her with a vague sense of familiarity, and she weakly turned her head.

“Is this the school-marm? I called to see — Good Lor' love us! — Nix!”

Miss Trent was in too much pain to start; she slowly raised her head, and slowly smiled. She had grown extremely pale — gray; but her smile was very sweet when she said, —

“Why, Lize!”

Whatever happened, she could not be ashamed of old Lize; it was not in her. But she thought,

"I hope the children will keep away," remaining, as Lize had found her, extremely pale.

"I'm beat!" said Lize. "Nix a school-marm! And I and Tim and the panoraymy comin' agin ye in this oncommon manner—as true as I be in my senses—Nix!"

"Tim!" said the "school-marm."

"Yes, Tim. Come home o' Christmas last,—Tim did. Did n't know on't, did ye? All of a Christmas afternoon in the sun I sits, rockin' Mis' Jeb Smith's last—two sence you was there—at Mis' Jeb Smith's window, when I sees the blue cart and the panoraymy and Tim a rovin' up and down Thicket in search o' his mother, by which I do not mean to excuse myself of being the mother of the panoraymy, but of Tim. And he see me. And he knows me. All through the window, in a flash—and I put Jeb's baby on the floor—and am out in the middle o' the street.

"'Hulloa, Tim!' says I.

"'Hulloa, marm!' says Tim.

"'Glad to see ye, Tim,' says I.

"'Is that a fact now?' says Tim,—for I took on awful at the time on't about the shooting business, and Tim warn't likely to forget it ower-soon.

“ ‘It speaks well for ye now, I must say !’ says Tim.

“ ‘That ’s none o’ *your* lookout,’ says I.

“ ‘See here, old lady,’ says Tim, ‘if you ain’t ashamed of me, nor yet of the panoraymy, s’pose you hang on ?’

“ ‘All right, my boy,’ says I.

“So I goes into Jeb’s and picks up my duds, and hangs on to Tim and the panoraymy, — which is an excellent business for seein’ of the country, and travellin’ adwantages in general, — and I’ve yet to see the cause to be ashamed neither of Tim nor yet of the panoraymy.”

“ ‘I alwers kind o’ considered as you ’d be ready for me, marm, when I got ready and fit for you,’ says Tim. Tim ’s no fool !”

“I am as glad as you are,” said Eunice, in an honest, steady voice, listening through it, — brokenly, — “I am glad with all my heart. You were good to me. I never forgot you, Lize.”

“How you did clear out in the dark, poor gal !” said Lize, loudly, “with that there heavy young un, and you but two weeks sick ! But how the mischief come you *here* ?”

“People have been kind to me.” Miss Trent

spoke very low, — listening. Was not that a step outside the door? Would Lize never, never stop? — never go?

Lize, on the contrary, moved nearer to the desk, — the grammar teacher spoke so very low, — and leaned heavily upon it, towering brown and gaunt and rough as a lifetime of Thicket Street could make her close to Eunice's little pinched, fine face, uplifted and listening —

"People have been very kind to me. I have led a changed and happy life —"

"Where is the baby?" Lize interrupted, in her loud, echoing whisper; it could have been heard throughout the room.

"I deserted it. It was carried to the Burley Street Nursery."

These words had dropped with desperate distinctness from her lips, when Eunice turned; turned — listened — hushed — and raised her eyes.

As she had expected, Christina stood just within the doorway, leaning against one of the desks. As she had expected, Christina stood like a statue.

I think she was hardly prepared for the frozen

horror, loathing, — whatever it was, a thing that struck to her heart like death, — which had settled about Christina's lips and eyes.

Her own face twitched spasmodically, and her hands, where they lay upon the desk, wrung each other purple.

Lize, chattering about the panoraymy, noticed them, stopped, and took them to chafe them in her great brown palms.

Christina, when she saw the old woman touch Eunice, shivered all over. Lize, at the sound of her start, turned, saw the young lady, looked keenly from one girl to another, and took the whole sight in.

"I've made a bad business here." She looked back at the young teacher, and her old face fell, much pained.

"I'd rather ha' chopped my hand off than to ha' blundered so, Nix! I'd best clear out o' yer way afore I'm up to further mischief. I might ha' known it would do ye no good to be seen chaffering with the likes of me, — more fool for 't!"

"You have done no harm," said Eunice, steadily, — "no harm at all. It was better so. I am

not ashamed of you, and you need not sorrow over what you said. It was quite as well. You were good to me, and you shall not sorrow for fear you did me harm. "It was no harm. By and by, when my head does not ache quite so hard, I shall not be sorry — not sorry, Lize."

"So you'll not come out to see the panoraymy?" said Lize, a little regretfully, turning as she tramped down the school-room aisle. "Tim would take it as an honor if ye would recommend the panoraymy to the children, of which the admission is half-price, and the seats preserved."

Eunice gently refused.

"Another time, Lize. Perhaps the next time you come through town, if—" she flushed suddenly, burning red (Christina stood so still!)—"if I am here the next time you come through town."

The door closed behind old Lize with a crash; Eunice listened to her thumping tread upon the steps; heard her shouting to Tim that "the school-marm was sick and could n't be bothered"; heard Tim shout back something very uncomplimentary to the school-marm; heard the

little blue cart rattle off, and the cries of the children faint away.

When all the noise was over, she raised her head.

Christina stood so very still !

To her dying day, Eunice Trent remembered just how the school-room looked that afternoon ; how Sarah Jones's slate and sponge lay upon the third desk, second row ; that Beb White's little dinner-pail was upon the floor ; that the "big boy" had tied a string across the left-hand aisle, and chalked a profile of Mr. Hobbs upon the right-hand blackboard ; that her own bonnet and shawl had tumbled from their nail ; how black the corners of the room were ; how fast the dusk crept in ; what a little pale streak of light there was left away beyond her sunset window ; and how Christina, in her white sack, shone out — so still ! — where she stood leaning against the desk beside the door.

The two — Eunice at the desk, Christina at the door — remained for some moments as old Lize had left them. Eunice was the first to break the silence. She said, —

" I can get home alone. You had better go."

All that she had been to Christina, all that Christina had been to her, the sacredness of one of the simplest, sweetest loves of woman to woman that I ever knew, seemed to Eunice to step down in the dusky school-room between herself and the shining figure by the door, — like a palpable, beautiful presence ; and it seemed to her that she said to it, —

“ You had better go.”

Christina automatically shook her head.

“ I say you had better go,” repeated Eunice. “ There,” as the door opened timidly, “ here is somebody waiting for me. Beb ? Yes, little Beb White for her dinner-pail. This way, Beb. Beb will wait a few minutes and walk home with me, won’t you, Beb ? Miss Purcell has another errand to-night. Go, Christina ! ”

She spoke with much decision, and much self-command. Christina went.

Eunice, through the dark, watched the beautiful palpable thing that went after her and went with her. The door shut them both out.

“ Poor Christina ! ” said Eunice ; “ poor Christina ! ”

She said nothing more, but her face dropped



into her hands heavily. She must have sat in the dusk, with her face in her hands, for some time. The room grew perfectly dark. Little Beb, with her little dinner-pail in her lap, sat on the platform.

“Are you sick?” asked little Beb, growing restless at last. Her teacher started, begged her pardon, and took her home. Little Beb kissed her when they parted, and stroked her face. This was a great comfort.

## CHAPTER XII.

## EUNICE AND CHRISTINA.

MRS. PURCELL took tea alone that night, and felt like boxing the ears of both the girls.

Anybody but Margaret would have been what we call "downright cross," when Eunice, about the middle of the evening, crawled, dizzy and white, down stairs, and felt her way to her cricket, to tell her all that had happened.

Margaret was not cross, but Margaret was worried, and thoroughly unstrung, and she broke into bitter self-reproaches.

"I might have known — expected it! My poor girls! I suppose I should have told Christina long ago, but she was so happy, — you were so happy! My poor, poor girls, — and I meant to do the best thing for you both. This comes of —"

Margaret checked herself. What would she

have said? Something far better left unsaid, perhaps; something of the flitting annoyance which people feel when a favorite experiment falters or fails. What if this "experiment" of doing one simple, Christ-like thing by the neglected soul which chance — or Christ — had flung across her path should now, and after all, and for years to come, prove the reef upon which the happiness of her home should split and wreck itself?

"It all depends on Christina!" she said, with some bitterness in her voice, "and we must own it is hard for Christina. What has she said to you?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing at all."

"Of course she must have been taken off her guard, and grieved; but did she give you no word or sign of affection — trust?"

"She gave me nothing. I asked for nothing. I had no right to anything."

Eunice spoke in a dull, dry way, which had a singular and painful effect upon the ear. It affected Mrs. Purcell with considerable physical disquiet

"You are sure you're not sick?"

"Only the headache, — no."

"Where is Christina?"

"Up stairs."

"I will go and call her down."

"No."

"I will send you up to her."

"I should not go."

"Christina is behaving like a school-girl!"

"Christina was deceived. Christina loved me."

"But Christina has such excellent, straightforward sense. I am ashamed of her!"

"That is not right. It is I of whom you should be ashamed. It is I of whom Christina is ashamed. It is I who have made all the misery. I wish —" In the dull dryness of Eunice's voice something snapped, and she faltered into a cry most pitiful to hear.

"I wish it were right to wish to be dead! I wish it were right to wish to be dead and out of the way!"

All Margaret's mother's heart, touched at first for her own child, was wrung now, in this miserable matter, for the outcast woman. So slight a fact is the pain of the world in face of the

guilt of it! Christina only suffered. Eunice had sinned.

“I have hurt you!” she said.

Eunice shook her head in a very lonely way. “Not much. Never mind. Let me go.”

She went away up stairs again, and shut herself into her room, — the soft gray room which Christina called “so like Nixy,” and which, by chance or by fancy, had always fallen to Eunice for her solitary occupation. A few changes had crept by degrees into it at that time. The pictures had disappeared; the little gray statuettes were gone; the sole ornament of the room had become an odd one, — a cross of some species of white wood, uncarved and bare; quite a large cross, and “inconvenient” Christina thought, — though I believe she never said so. Nobody said anything about it, or interfered with the quaint, Roman Catholic fancy of the thing. It stood out against the plain tint of the wall, nearly as high as Eunice’s shoulder. She did not say her prayers to it, or hang her beads upon it. As nearly as I can learn, she never did anything more heretical than look at it; “liked,” she said, “to feel that it was about.”

When, long after Margaret was asleep, long after the house was still, Christina, that night, came in, — for Christina came at last, — she came upon a striking sight, — the room all in a gray mist, for the candle had burned low ; and Eunice, in her black dress, at the foot of the white cross.

Christina stopped upon the threshold, but whether from reverence or from reluctance, how should Eunice know ?

Eunice neither turned nor spoke. She wished that she could drop and die there, and never turn or speak again, and so never, never look at the figure standing in the door.

“Eunice !”

Eunice lifted a singular face. Whether to cry out at the pain of it, whether to marvel at the peace of it, Christina did not know. Eunice lifted her face and rose, and looked the figure in the door all over, once, twice, in silence.

Christina had on a white wrapper and held a little lamp in her hand. She held it, having come into the dim room so suddenly, high over her head, to see the way ; her round white arm was bare and her hair loose ; the light had a

peculiar effect in dropping on her, and her eyes from a soft shadow peered out a little blindly.

Something about her reminded Eunice of a picture which she had seen of the woman hunting for a lost piece of silver, after the house was swept.

"You cannot find it," she said.

"But I can!" said Christina. She put down her lamp, and sat down quite full in the light of it upon the edge of the bed. Eunice, exhausted, sank again at the foot of her great cross, and it was dark where she sat.

"Come here," said Christina. Eunice shook her head.

"Look at me then." Eunice looked at her. Christina, white all over, — white to the lips, — sat smiling. All the stars had indeed gone out of her eyes, but they shone, and something sweeter than starlight was in them.

"I should like, if you will come, to kiss you, dear." Christina said this in a broken voice.

"I do not understand you." Eunice spoke with dreary quiet.

"If you will come," repeated Christina, — Eunice did not see that she quivered like a white

lily which the wind had bruised, — “if you will come, I should like to tell you how I hurt you, wronged you, — for I had no time to think, and I had never guessed, never dreamed! — and I loved you, Eunice, I loved you so!”

Christina began at this to cry, and she cried as women like her cry when their hearts are breaking. What did she expect? Eunice sat perfectly still.

“Why do you not speak to me?” Christina cried, at length, breaking her sharp sobs off. “I know that I wronged you, hurt you, but I cannot bear this, Eunice!”

“Hush!” said Eunice, in stern surprise. “Why do you talk of wrong and hurt? You are compassionate, Christina, but you are unwise.”

“But I love you, Eunice. Is that compassion? I honor you. Is that unwise?”

Eunice’s drawn lip quivered a little; a slow, warm light crept over her face.

“But I sinned,” she said.

“But I judged,” said Christina.

“I was stained, and outcast.”

“You are pure and honored.”



"I deceived you."

"You loved me."

"But now you can never forget."

"But now I will never remember."

"But a scar is a scar forever."

"My eyes are holden," said Christina ; "I see no scar. Eunice, see!" — she broke from the strained, excited mood in which she seemed to be, into a quiet, faltering voice, — "see, this is how it is! I was taken all in a minute off my guard — in the school-room there ; but that was no excuse for me. I wronged you, Eunice ! I am here to beg your pardon for thoughts I have had of you to-night. I came in to tell you — that I loved you — loved you — loved you, dear !"

It was then for the first time that Eunice fairly lifted her haggard face, and held up her arms.

"Come here to me," said Christina ; "I will not lift you from the foot of that cross. I judged you. It is you who shall come to me. There !"

But when she was yet a great way off, Christina ran to meet her, and fell upon her neck and kissed her.

"Stop a moment" ; Eunice held her off. "I

shall go and find the — the child now. You will be ashamed of me. I had rather you would not love me than to be ashamed of me.”

“ Eunice, look here ! ”

Eunice looked there, — straight into Christina’s spotless woman’s eyes, — and it seemed to her as if all the stars of heaven were shining in them as the stars shine after storms.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## UNE FEMME BLANCHE.

MY DEAR. JANE BRIGGS:—

I am crowded for time, but I write to tell you—for I would prefer that you should hear it from me—that we have at length identified and brought home Eunice's child.

This was done without much difficulty. The boy remained at the Burley Street Nursery, whither he had been sent by Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle; it being, as you will remember, upon Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle's steps that Nixy left the child, at some period previous to her entrance into Mrs. Myrtle's service.

Mrs. Myrtle, I fancy, has kept a kind of vague patronage over the boy; sent him bibs and Bibles, and patted him on the head on inspection-day.

He could, of course, have been easily traced, had we not possessed the clew of his resemblance

to his mother. This resemblance in itself would have been sufficient to identify the little waif.

The little boy has a pleasant face, and Eunice's eyes. If he had her mouth I should not object in the least to him. I confess to some secret anxiety on that point. A baby less than five years old has no mouth whatever. I wonder if the poor little fellow knows how unwelcome he is! He looks amazingly uncomfortable, it strikes me; but that may be because his mother put him into white aprons, and parted his hair.

Whenever I think how the future happiness of us all—for Eunice's future, as you understand, is now definitely and intelligently my daughter's and mine—is dependent upon that little neglected graft of shame and sin, I am, I own, uncomfortable.

I do not regret the step, but it is a difficult one for us all to take. Poor Eunice I suppose was right; I could not gainsay her quiet "God cares for the baby, if I don't"; and what we have undertaken we shall thoroughly perform,—but poor Eunice is in a very narrow place.

The child has been in the house now two days. His mother is uneasy and pale; watches

him carefully, kindly, — never fondles him ; seems very nervous and restless, evidently perfectly prepared for whatever cloud we are drifting to windward of.

By my advice she remains at her post as grammar teacher. Whatever social degradation is in waiting for her, she shall not assume that she can be degraded. Christianity does not patch up a sinner, it restores him. In Christian theory Eunice's history is as if it had not been. Christian practice may bind her budding youth down, hands and feet, with it ; but Christian practice shall do it in teeth of the gospel stories, and under the very astonished eyes of Christ.

I have not bounded into this feeling about Eunice, — you know me, Jane, — but perhaps it is the stronger because I acquired it by such a vacillating, jerky process. Christina, whose arrowy intuitions failed her once for a few of the most miserable hours that have ever darkened our home life, accepts my judgments in this matter, with "improvements." I am learning rather to lean upon than to guide my maiden child in unfurling sail for the outcast's frowning weather.

"Whatever happens, I believe we are ready for

it," Christina said this morning, with compressing lips. "It seems as if the Lord and you and I might make a place for Eunice and the baby in this world!"

The relations between Eunice and Christina have grown of late singularly fitted, singularly sweet. I take great comfort in them. Whatever else may come, I shall rest, as I grow sick and old, — perhaps I should say sicker and older, — in seeing my two girls at peace together.

Eunice has crowned my life with a kind of oriental opulence of blessing, — a gorgeous privilege. So it seems to me in looking back. So it grows upon me in looking on. The struggles which she has cost me, the annoyances, doubts, dreads, perplexities, pains, risks, were but the ushers in the ante-room of a great, unworthy sense of use and the highest joy in life, — the joy of uses.

Of all the debt under which the outcast child has laid me, the heaviest and the sweetest is her influence over, and her affection for, Christina.

My daughter and I unite in the feeling that it is the least which we can do for her, to take her poor baby into our family, and help her — as

Nixy used to say — “help her bear what folks shall say, and all that.”

At this writing, as you see, her relations to society are weighing in the balance. Fortunately, — I say fortunately, for it will save the poor girl some inevitable disquiet, — we, as a family, go into what is called “company” very little ; Eunice, less.

I doubt if there are two cultivated Christian families among our acquaintances who would invite Eunice to their parlors, after she shall have sat in my pew next Sunday with her little boy. This may be natural, may be inevitable ; it is none the less uncomfortable.

I anticipate some assistance, much sympathy, in what is before us all, from one Christian man at least, — our physician, Dr. Burtis. I do not see but that he treats Eunice with as much respect since as before he walked in yesterday morning and found her sitting with her child upon her lap. Certain points in the doctor please me, though his beard is as streaked as a zebra. I have had flitting fancies — But nonsense ! There is the dinner-bell too.

More, on a later or less hungry occasion.

The storm for which, at the dating of this note, the three women sat holding their breath in waiting, broke quickly and naturally.

The little Burley Street baby had been, perhaps, four days in Mrs. Purcell's family before all Gower was agape ; five, before Gower was aghast ; six, before Gower was aggrieved ; seven, before Gower's grammar-school committee called upon Miss Trent.

Five respectable, virtuous, pious, "prominent" men, — fathers of respectable, virtuous, pious, prominent families, — "three selectmen and two gold-headed canes !" whispered Christina, trying to make Eunice laugh. But poor Eunice did not even try to laugh.

"I would rather they were — women," she said, and stood and trembled.

"It is no business for you !" said Mrs. Purcell, with her eyes very much lighted, and pushed her aside.

The committee were both surprised and embarrassed, either at the lady's unexpected entrance, or by something in her appearance after she was there. Mrs. Purcell begged their pardon for her intrusion, and with much courtesy, but



much decision, excused Miss Trent in her own name, pointedly inquiring, Could they transact their business with her?

The spokesman coughed, deferred to a gold cane, a cane consulted a selectman, a selectman another selectman; the other selectman demurred, deferred, consulted, coughed, and the spokesman, having "swung around the circle" (though he did not know it, it was so many years ago), undertook the individual responsibility of undertaking to make Mrs. Purcell undertake to understand the peculiar delicacy — "*pe-cu-liar* delicacy, my dear madam" — of the position in which he, the spokesman, *as* spokesman, and they, the selectmen and gold canes, *as* selectmen and gold canes, were unavoidably and most undesirably placed.

"The fact being, my dear madam, that the guardianship of youth and the position of — of — you might say, pickets, — pickets, madam, in the great forces of youthful culture, are — in fact are sacred trusts — sacred trusts!"

To this Mrs. Purcell cheerfully assented.

"And however unpleasant," pursued the Committee, "however *unpleasant*, as well as unfor-

fortunate and undesirable, it may oftentimes be to perform the duties attendant upon those trusts, — yet the future of our youth — ”

“ Precisely, sir,” assisted Mrs. Purcell.

“ Depends ! ” continued the Committee, reddening, — “ *depends* upon the faithfulness with which such duties, however unfortunate, are performed. And when reflections upon the character of a hitherto much respected and valued instructor of youth — ”

The Committee paused.

“ Go on, sir,” urged Mrs. Purcell.

(“ Won’t help me an inch, that ’s clear,” thought the Committee.)

“ When such reflections as have been this week cast upon the character of Miss Trent are thrust upon our attention, madam,” broke out the Committee, bluntly, “ the matter must be looked into, that ’s all ! And that — begging your pardon — is what we are here for.”

“ So I supposed.”

But Mrs. Purcell supposed nothing further, and the business was fast becoming an awkward one, when a gold cane knocked it slowly upon its feet, by slowly and very solemnly inquiring, —

If — she — were — prepared — to — de — ny — the — re —  
flections — cast — upon — the — char — acter — of — the —  
young — lady — understood to be re — siding in her  
fam — ily ?

To this Mrs. Purcell replied quietly in the full negative.

The five committee-men arched five pairs of eyebrows, and paused again.

“Miss Trent’s child, as undoubtedly you have heard,” pursued Mrs. Purcell, in a very even voice, “is at this time under my roof. Miss Trent’s past history has been, in some respects, a very unfortunate one. Of Miss Trent’s present character and position in the confidence of that society which is formed by character, there cannot be found, in Gower, two opinions, I think.”

“Perhaps not, madam, — perhaps not ; undoubtedly not. But our position as — as pickets of educational interests, and the future of our impressible youth, demand — as you must own, madam — that something should be done about this extra-ordinary case. Perhaps — considering the sacred interests of youth, and the — the blamed awkwardness of the affair !” ex-

ploded the spokesman, with a sudden influx of energy, if loss of dignity, "Miss Trent might feel inclined; for the sake of all parties, to — that is, to resign, madam!"

The spokesman drew breath, and wiped his forehead.

"Are you not satisfied," queried Mrs. Purcell, "with Miss Trent's intrinsic qualifications for her present position?"

"Why — yes, madam, — yes — yes; on the whole, yes. The young lady has indeed given very particular satisfaction to the Board since she has been at the post of duty in question, — very particular satisfaction."

"You have found her to be able, faithful, consistent, an intelligent, active, pure-minded, pure-lived lady, in all her connections with your school?"

"Perfectly so, — perfectly; on the whole, all that we could have desired for our purposes in that department, which can but make the present crisis, as you see, my dear madam, all the more unfortunate, as the parents of several of our youth, in demanding the young lady's resignation from her post of responsibility

over the tender infant heart, have already observed."

"Since this young lady has not as yet corrupted beyond repair the impressible infant minds of Gower —"

Mrs. Purcell checked herself, and in a different tone and very earnestly said : —

"Gentlemen, I presume, as you say, that you are in a very awkward position, but it seems to me — for I never have been a picket in the forces of youthful culture — a very simple position to get out of. Look at the matter! This young girl, by your own showing, has lived without guile among you. I give you my testimony as a Christian lady — whatever that is worth — to the purity of her private character. It strikes me that it would be good sense not to be over-hasty in superseding a trusted veteran in Gower's educational attacks on Gower's infant mind. It strikes me that it would be good Christianity, — I would beg your pardon for introducing Christianity into business, if I were not talking, as I believe I am, to Christian men, — it strikes me that it would be good Christianity to heal rather than to cripple a young life like Miss Trent's."

The committee, somewhat ill at ease, implied that Mrs. Purcell was well known to be an excellent Christian woman, and quick in her Christian sympathies, for which the committee highly respected her ; that Mrs. Purcell's remarks would be — in, for instance, a church matter — very much to the point of the subject, but that when it came to the business of the week, — and the common look of things, — and the guardianship of the youthful mind, and responsibilities to the State —

Mrs. Purcell interrupted here, by inquiring concisely if she were to understand this as a formal dismissal of Miss Trent from her position.

“Hardly that, my dear madam, — hardly that ; our chairman and one other member of the committee being out of town, we have been as yet unable to take formal decisive action upon the matter, — indeed, were anxious to spare Miss Trent as much as possible in that respect ; but, as the tide of public feeling is so strong, we thought that perhaps a voluntary resignation —”

“You condemn your prisoner untried,” said Mrs. Purcell, decidedly. “I should prefer, as so

little remains now, apparently, which can be 'spared Miss Trent,' that there should be a formal action taken on this business before we hold any further conversation of this kind. I do not hesitate to speak for Miss Trent without consultation with her, since she has placed herself entirely under my advice in a matter so difficult and painful for a young girl to manage personally. I should prefer that the matter be put through whatever red-tape is necessary, and that Miss Trent, if dismissed from her position, be openly and formally dismissed."

Within an hour after the departure of the committee from Mrs. Purcell's parlor, the door-bell pealed nervously through the house, and Mr. Hobbs peremptorily summoned Eunice to the door.

"Just in from the station," panted Mr. Hobbs, tipping his hat (poor Eunice noticed this) in hurried respect, "and I find the whole world upside-down! Called to tell you, young lady, *not* to give it up! I can stand on my own feet yet, and so can you. What's the use of your feet if you don't? Can you answer me that? No! You shall hear from me again. Yes, yes,

yes; you shall hear from me again — and the doctor 'll be on hand before night. There's canes enough in that committee, but it's poorly off for understanding, the committee is. I give it up if I can't stand out against the whole of 'em!"

I have always understood that Mr. Hobbs did. The particulars of the affair I have forgotten, if I ever knew. The result of several agitated meetings of the school-committee, conveyed by Dr. Burtis, through Mrs. Purcell, to Miss Trent, was a formal request that the grammar teacher would, for the present, retain the position which she had — *hitherto* held to the entire satisfaction of the Board.

The conditional nature of the proposition annoyed Miss Trent. Perhaps, left to herself, she would, in spite of Mr. Hobbs, have "given it up"; but Margaret and the doctor overurged her, and the young teacher did not at that time resign.

Indeed, what could she do? With the support of her little boy just fallen upon her, to be thrust disgraced from her desk at school was to be thrust disgraced from every practicable means of earning a livelihood. Who would have con-



fidence in the outcast woman whom Gower's grammar-school committee had delighted to dishonor? What chance was there for her in the world, if she should step out into it with a child's fingers dragging at her hands? The Scarlet Letter was upon her. The little Burley Street Nursery baby's eyes were a living advertisement of her shame. Since she held up her brave young head and bore it, — for Christ's sake, who had forgiven her, — what could good men and women do but throw their stones and pass her by? To have concealed her story, to have cloaked her sin, would have been quite another matter. Society might have suspected, society might have been assured of it, but as long as the poor girl deserted her own, denied her flesh and blood, society would have dealt — a little shyly with her, perhaps, but society would not have refused her bread and butter.

Now, less for the sin than for the acknowledgment of sinning, — and for the sake of a single sin, and the sin of a child, and the sin of a motherless Thicket Street child, — the penitent, pure woman was a branded, manacled thing.

Within a week after she brought the little boy

home, Eunice began to comprehend this. Prepared as she was for it, blindly prepared for anything, when the tangible facts of the case faced her she felt bewildered. She was so very young! Years upon years stretched out before her — foredoomed. Society had hedged her in on every side.

“I am not bad!” she said, turning drearily to Margaret, and holding up her hands as if to be lifted. “They know I am not bad! It was so long ago, — and I have been so sorry! And nobody taught me, told me. Have n’t I been a good woman long enough to belong in a good woman’s place?”

“I have heard of a thing called living down, or living out, the ghost of such a history as yours,” said Margaret, firmly. “There are men on that grammar-school committee who have done it. I never knew a woman who did. If a woman *can*, you shall!”

“If a woman can.” Can she? Since sin was sin, and shame was shame, One only has made this an easy, if indeed a possible, thing beneath the sun. His theology preached it; his practice pushed it. He risked his reputation for it.

He multiplied instances to bring it into public notice. He left it graven with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond, upon the record of his life: This Man eateth with publicans and sinners. To him first, last, and only in his church the sin of a woman was not eternal. Certain of his followers have groped after this intricate charity, — but it is a subtile thing, and high; who can attain unto it? What if, in some distant unearthing of graces in the Christian standards of thought and act, it shall be said, This was the very stone which the builders rejected?

Margaret felt very much as if she were making an attack upon the whole superstructure of refined Christian custom, when she sent her daughter and Eunice's little boy to accompany Eunice home from school one afternoon, when gossip was at its busiest with the young teacher's name; and when grave, decorous parents were gravely, decorously, and daily removing their children from Miss Trent's charge, — for this thing was done to an alarming extent within a fortnight from the period of the compromise offered by the committee between the future of

the infant mind and the ruin of a young girl's good name.

"Three new vacancies to-day," said Eunice, sadly smiling, as she and Christina and the child came down the school-house steps. "Are you not ashamed to walk through the streets with me? See, the sidewalk is full of people."

"Do I look ashamed?"

Christina drew Eunice's trembling hand close upon her arm, and there was something in the firmness and tenderness of the touch which gave Eunice a protected, comforted feeling,—the stronger because of Christina's youth and innocence.

All the streets of the little town were full, as they went home together. People nodded and passed; people stared and passed; people whispered and passed. Certain of the school committee touched their hats with ominous solemnity. Sarah Jones and her father crossed the street to avoid a meeting with the three. Little Beb White's mother, Christina noticed, drew away her dress where it touched in passing the poor little fellow trudging along at Eunice's side. The night fell fast, and the lights came out, and the

golden web seemed to Eunice to net her in as it had netted her in before. She felt tangled, lost.

“Leave me to get out alone,” she said.

“You are nervous, Eunice. Do not try to talk. Hush! Do I look as if I could leave you to get out alone? Look again! There! Give me the boy. You are too tired to lead him.”

Christina drew the little fellow to her side, and led him gently all the way home. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks flushed; she carried her head with a certain pride which, to Eunice’s excited fancy, seemed for the moment rather to widen than to bridge the gulf between them. She almost wished that Christina were ashamed of her.

When Christina, thinking to say a pleasant thing, said, —

“Never mind the people, Eunice. I do not care. What harm can they do *me*?” — she remembered, with a singularly keen sense of discomfort, a thing which Monsieur Jacques in the guitar-shop had said of Dahlia his wife: —

“She was *une femme blanche*. She could well afford to cry over a little girl like you.”

She looked across her child into Christina’s confident young eyes, and thought, with exceed-

ing bitterness, how far beyond, forever beyond, *her* reach was that whiteness which could “afford” to put both shining hands into the ditch and draw them forth unstained.

They passed some one in turning in at the gate. Christina—her head lifted, and her arm around Eunice’s little boy—paused to see who it was, but did not see, and hurried in.

“Did you not meet the doctor?” asked her mother. “He has this minute left.”

It happened to Eunice on that same evening to be called on some slight errand late to Christina’s door. Christina was up, and reading. Eunice apologized for the disturbance.

“I believe I left the apron here that the child must wear to-morrow”; his mother, it had been noticed, always called him, somewhat drearily, “the child”; shrank from naming him as long as she could; seldom, if ever, made use of the name which Mrs. Purcell finally fastened upon the little fellow,—a name which meant nothing to anybody, and nothing in itself, but all the better for that, and at least sensible and pleasant to the ear,—Kent.

“Come in,” said Christina, “I was only read-

ing." She closed her book — her little English Testament — as she spoke, and with unusual gentleness held out her arms to Eunice. Eunice came and stood beside her for a moment, with the little apron across her arm, and Christina noticed that she was very thoughtful, very still.

"What is it, dear?"

"Nothing."

"Tell me, Eunice."

"It is *you*, then, Christina."

"What have I done?"

"Made of an outcast woman — in the eyes of all the world to-day — your personal friend. I have been thinking it over since I have been in my room, and the child has been asleep, — he was so long going to sleep! Perhaps I got tired and worried. I did not mean to hurt you, Christina."

For Christina was uncommonly silent, — sitting with her bright head dropped.

"What have you been 'thinking over' in your room, Eunice?"

"What a different thing it would have been if you had — condescended, you know, dear, been forgiving, kind, all that a noble, charitable lady

could be expected to be to me. *Then*, people would all understand, admire you."

"Do you mean that they will not understand, admire me now?" Christina smiled.

"I do not know how to tell you" — Eunice hesitated — "what I mean. It seems like supposing that a breath could hurt you. And yet —"

"‘And yet,’ Eunice?"

"After all," said Eunice, slowly, "such a thing as you are doing was never known of a lady pure as you before."

"Perhaps so, perhaps not, — very likely not."

"You put me on your level; you made me fine and good as you, when you walked with such shining eyes home from school with me to-day!"

"I hope I did."

"But I could not bear it that a false word should hit you," said Eunice, with earnest, troubled lips; "and how can people understand that you may take me in *this* way — any other way but *this*, — into your confidence and love? How can they see me, with the child beside me, all my life, and never say that you lost in fine-



ness, lost in — something, when you chose a woman such as I to be your intimate, trusted friend? And I wondered — do not blame me, dear — if you had not better wait for heaven, where things *can* be forgotten?”

Christina looked up; perhaps she had been quicker than Eunice to think of this, — it was but natural; her eyelashes were wet, though her eyes were as still as a June morning. She lifted her little Testament; it opened where she had closed it, and she held it for a moment, with some hesitation, in her hand.

“I was reading when you came in —”

Eunice looked over her shoulder and saw what she had been reading; it was the story of Mary of Bethany.

“I had forgotten,” said Christina, softly, “if I ever knew, that it was she \* who loved much and was forgiven, — the woman in the city which was a sinner. And that she — I feel as if I must beg your pardon, dear, for saying it, she was so wicked! — *she* became what you call ‘the intimate, trusted friend’ of the Lord Jesus Christ;

\* It should, perhaps, be noted, since Christina was ignorant of the fact, that upon this point commentators differ.

perhaps, excepting John, the most intimate, trusted friend he had. He believed in her, loved her, and all the world knew it! What do you suppose *He* had of 'fineness' to 'lose'? Eunice, I am not afraid!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

## A STORM OF WIND.

DEAR JANE:—

Whatever there is to tell you this time is the quiet close of a stormy epoch in our family history, — rich in wrecks, like all stormy things.

I believe it is a month to-day since the poor unwelcome baby, for whom we have all suffered, and through whom we have all learned so much, was buried.

He had been with us just a year. I see, now that we are out of it, better than I did while we were in it, what a trying year it was to his mother, and to us for his mother's sake. So alarming perils grow when they are over!

Eunice, I think, was in considerable peril, not only of direct social degradation, but of that exceeding bitterness of spirit which only social degradation can incite, and which, in a life so

young as Eunice's, is a sadder thing than death. How she stands related to the first of these dangers is a problem as yet in process of solution, perhaps. The second has passed her by, and left her the serenity of a statue in inclement weather.

As you know, she remained, by my decided advice, at her desk in school. Christina and I between us managed to keep the boy at home, and happy, while she was gone.

With a courage which nothing but conscious whiteness could have given her, the poor girl braved for weeks the unhinged tongues of every gossip, every anxious parent, every responsible trustee in Gower. The retention of her position raised a furious storm. Twice she wrote and signed her resignation ; twice and again Mr. Hobbs (the queer little grocer, — do you remember him ?) — Mr. Hobbs and the doctor between them over-urged, over-argued, overawed, — I do not know which or how ; but the resignation never went in ; the committee never asked for it.

The school thinned, dwindled. Gower grumbled, growled. The poor little teacher paled and trembled, but tied up her white face in her

veil every day, and marched off bravely to her post.

So far she has held it like a sentinel. At the time of her child's death her desks were full again, and the public knew it, and the public went about its business, and let her alone. It is some time since I have heard anything about the safety of the public morals, or the future of the infant mind. Alarmed parents have been thrown off their guard, trustees and committees have grown serene.

This change has been brought about on simple business grounds.

"If you *don't* give it up," said Mr. Hobbs, "Gower will stand upon its own feet, and look out for its p's and q's. It's for Gower's advantage to keep you in that grammar school, and Gower will find it out."

Apparently Gower found out, in Gower's own convenient season, that, in spite of itself, the grammar-school prospered. This seemed to be owing primarily to Miss Trent's personal influence over the children; and I must say this, now and here, for Eunice,—her influence over children is a remarkable one. This has surprised me, be-

cause she has exhibited so little instinctive maternal fondness for her own child. I have sometimes fancied that it was the conscious want of this which has made her so studiously tender of all children.

It is certain that her scholars have evinced, both before and since her acknowledgment of little Kent, an affection for her, and belief in her, unusual both in amount and kind. She has a rare moulding power, as nearly as I can judge, and a patience in finish, not common to the trade ; has contrived to make herself interested in the children from their souls to their stockings ; has become their confidante, friend ; and —

“Has raised the standard of scholarship,” Dr. Burtis adds, “forty per cent within a year.”

I have been told one other thing of Eunice, which has not in the least surprised me, but has given me a genuine unsanctified sense of individual triumph over public opinion. Certain true-hearted, clear-eyed mothers — relenting and respecting — are whispering to each other that the outcast girl, whom they virtuously passed by upon the other side, has been diligent in effecting that most intricate and delicate of

educational "objects," — the purity of a school of little children.

"Beb has gone back, — yes," said little Beb White's mother yesterday to me. "And I begged her teacher's pardon when I sent her, — yes, I did. Folks may say what folks like ! *I* 've heard that as makes me ready — and not ashamed of it neither — to trust my child to Eunice Trent quick as I would to her own mother, God bless her !"

Excitement and care together have worn upon Eunice through the year. Her blind headaches have increased, and she has a curious pulse, which puzzles the doctor. Her child's sickness found her weak, and left her weaker. Just now she is unfit for work, and at home.

The relations between Eunice and her child were singular ; death has softened quite as much as it has saddened them.

In every maternal duty she was faithful to punctiliousness. Whether she blacked his shoes or heard his prayers, she did it with an eye single to little Kent. She taught him, caressed him, watched him. She took extreme pains that he should never be permitted to feel that she was

ashamed of him ; sometimes, I fancied, took him to walk when the streets were crowded for no other reason.

“ The boy shall be as happy as he can,” she sadly said.

The boy was, I think, happy enough ; grew just as fond of her as if he had been better loved, poor little fellow ! fondled her, trotted after her, cried for her. Eunice never repelled, never neglected him. Yet sometimes when he climbed up into her lap and laid his little face against her cheek, “ to love mamma,” it made my heart ache to see how patient, smiling, and still “ mamma ” would sit ; to notice the absence of all the little silly, motherly ways and words that happy mothers kiss into a baby’s opening life.

Sometimes, when the child was asleep, she used to sit and watch him with a certain brooding, unloving, yet very anxious look, inexpressibly mournful to me.

“ Eunice,” I said one day, “ can’t we manage to love the little fellow ? ”

“ He shall not know it if I cannot,” she answered, huskily. I did not know which to pity more, the child or mother.



He never did know it, poor baby! To the last he clung to her, and cried for her; to the last she watched and caressed him. When scarlet fever of the worst type (it is supposed that Eunice brought the infection from little Beb White's sister, with whom she had watched) struck the child down, his mother was all that any mother could have been.

"Should have thought she was fond of him, if I did n't know better," said the doctor.

The disease was of the short, sure, malignant kind. Dr. Burtis told us from the first that the child would die, though he treated him with great skill and kindness. Eunice, I think, never believed this; expected him to live with that dogged persistency which may indicate either hope or fear with equal aptness. Once I found her by his bedside upon her knees.

"For what are you praying, Eunice?" She raised a perplexed face.

"I do not want him to die! I do not want him to die! I was praying—I believe I was praying that I might be able to pray for my child's life."

Did she? Who can say? It would be pleas-

ant to think that the child took with him the sweetness of one genuine, hearty, mother's longing for his stay. I noticed, that, as he grew sicker, Eunice's tenderness deepened in manifold little ways ; grew into a thing so like love that the counterfeit, if counterfeit it were, rang like coin.

The change—that awful thing which old nurses call “the gray change”—struck the child at midnight of the 21st. Eunice, exhausted with watching, had fallen asleep upon my lounge. I was reluctant to wake her, as she had not slept for days and nights before ; but the doctor was imperative about it, and Christina, at his direction, called and brought her in.

It was a bitter night, with a storm of wind that had raged since morning,—one of those dry, savage gales, which, as Mrs. Myrtle would say, are “so depressing,”—just such a gale as that we had—perhaps you remember—on the night when Christina's father died. There has never been a death in my house which did not occur in a storm of wind.

I noticed that Eunice noticed it, as she came in and looked at the child's face. She shivered

a little, looking toward the window, drew her shawl about her, pushed us all away, and managed to lift the little boy upon her arm.

Upon her arm, without word, or sign, or struggle, he died. She had pulled her loose hair down, or it had fallen, so that it hid both the child's face and her own.

For some moments after the doctor withdrew his finger from the pulse, and signed to us that it was all over, she sat motionless, hiding both faces in her hair.

It may have come, as Nixy once said, "all along of the grayness of the room," or because of the peculiar effect which that great white cross, near which I sat, always has upon me; but all that I could think, as we sat, the doctor, Christina, and I, waiting for Eunice to move, was of the tear-washed Feet which once were wiped with a woman's hair. A Presence stronger than death stepped in, or so I thought, between Eunice and the little changed face upon her arm. And I could see that she wept upon it, kissed it, before she laid her dead child down before it, and rose, — for her faith had saved her, — and went her way in peace.

She placed the little body with great gentleness upon the pillow, and, with a mournful waste of tenderness, covered it carefully, and tucked it up, as if the boy had been going to sleep for the night.

She looked round upon us all, — a little surprised and frightened, it seemed, — went to the window and listened for a moment to the long, heavy, regular waves of wind that beat upon the house. It sounded as if the tide of a mighty sea were up about us ; in the distance, where the thick of the village broke it, there was a noise like surf.

“ It seems a dreadful night — for a baby — to go out in,” said Eunice, under her breath.

She said nothing more. We led her away to bed, and she slept till morning.

The wind, with daylight, went down ; the mighty tides ebbed away ; the surf changed into a little sweet sobbing, like that of a child who cried for joy.

In the calm of the sunrise I went into little Kent's room to see if all were well.

In some way, when we did not know it, his mother had got in before me, and sat still and

straight in a chair by the bed, looking the dead child full in the face.

There was frost upon the windows, and a pink light in the room, and the great cross, as white as one, relieved against the other, shone out behind her. I noticed that, by some chance, one of Kent's little dresses had been hung upon its arm, and that a tiny tin horse on wheels stood upon the base of the solemn thing.

"He looks like me," said Eunice, suddenly, without turning her head. "Do you not think so?"

The little still face, fine and fair with the fineness and fairness of death, had indeed caught something, especially about its dubious mouth, of Eunice's delicate beauty.

"I wonder," she went on, without waiting for my answer, "if he will look like me in heaven. I hope I shall be glad to see him!"

She got up and moved restlessly about the room, went to the frosty window that the pink light was melting, and remarked how the wind had fallen. Coming back, she noticed the dress and little horse, and where they were. She stooped to remove them—her hand trembled

— she put them back, and came and sat down upon the bed, with quivering lips.

“ My poor little baby ! I might have loved it — might have — ”

There I heard her sob, and there I left her.

Jane Briggs ! There is nothing in the world to cry about ; but that is no reason why one should not cry if one wants to, I suppose ? though it is reason sufficient for not spoiling several reams of one's best gilt-edged note-paper. Therefore I am

Yours,

MARGARET P.

P. S. — Did I tell you that we buried the child in the old ugly churchyard — at least, I had thought it rather ugly, till Eunice told me how much she liked it, and how she wished that little Kent should lie there — over on the purple hill behind the house ?

M.

I find laid away with this letter, a little, sweet, familiar song of Kingsley's. Shall I copy it as it comes ? It falls on the close of my chapter like a chant at the end of a service of prayers.

“ Clear and cool, clear and cool,  
By laughing shallow and dreaming pool ;  
Cool and clear, cool and clear,  
By shining shingle and foaming weir ;  
Under the crag where the ouzel sings,  
And the ivied wall where the church-bell rings,  
Undefined, for the undefined ;  
Play by me, bathe in me, mother and child !

“ Dank and foul, dank and foul,  
By the smoky town in its marshy cowl ;  
Foul and dank, foul and dank,  
By wharf and sewer and slimy bank ;  
Darker and darker the farther I go,  
Baser and baser the richer I grow ;  
Who dare sport with the sin-defiled ?  
Shrink from me, turn from me, mother and child !

“ Strong and free, strong and free,  
The floodgates are open away to the sea ;  
Free and strong, free and strong,  
Cleansing my streams as I hurry along,  
To the golden sands and the leaping bar,  
And the taintless tide that awaits me afar,  
As I lose myself in the infinite main,  
Like a soul that has sinned and is pardoned again ;  
Undefined for the undefined,  
Play by me, bathe in me, mother and child ! ”

## CHAPTER XV.

## A PRAYER-MEETING.

CHRISTINA was going to a prayer-meeting. This may sound very much like a Sunday-school book, — I spare the “cricket’s eye” the trouble of making the observation for me, — but as long as it is a fact that Christina *was* going to a prayer-meeting, I am compelled, for the sake of history, at any cost, to make the statement. I should add, perhaps, that it was a Sabbath night, which may be considered as excusable of the circumstance that Christina *did* go to the prayer-meeting. When I further record that Mrs. Purcell did not go to the prayer-meeting (being on duty at the minister’s, who had six babies, chicken-pox, a sick wife, and the prayer-meeting on his hands), and that Dr. Dyke Burtis did, I have made three statements of no interest to anybody unless I except Christina and the doctor, — and that is no business of ours, because they were



going to a prayer-meeting; but I have, I trust, proved as clearly and briefly as possible, to the most heretical mind, that, and why, Eunice, who was too ill to go to a prayer-meeting on the evening in question, was alone in the house.

“Not afraid?” said Christina, stooping to kiss her, as the doctor’s ring summoned her half reluctantly away. “You look so lonely! What is the book,—Herbert? It must be as melancholy as — as going nutting, to read Herbert of a winter’s evening, all alone in the house!”

Eunice smiled, but when Christina had gone, and her laugh, tinkling as if a Swiss bell-ringer were touching wedding music on it, had died away from hearing, her smile faded quite. Perhaps the reading was as “melancholy” as one of Herbert’s own “sowre-sweete dayes.” She turned the leaf, half listening to Christina, and when silence dropped slowly reread the poem.

“When blessed Marie wip’d her Saviour’s feet,  
(Whose precepts she had trampled on before)  
And wore them for a jewell on her head,  
Shewing his steps should be the street,  
Wherein she thenceforth evermore  
With pensive humblenesse would live and tread :

“ She being stain’d herself, why did she strive  
To make him clean who could not be defil’d ?  
Why kept she not her tears for her own faults,  
And not his feet ? Though we could dive  
In tears like seas, our sinnes are pil’d  
Deeper than they, in words, and works, and thoughts.

“ Deare soul, she knew who did vouchsafe and deigne  
To bear her filth : and that her sinnes did dash  
E’en God himself : wherefore she was not loth  
As she had brought wherewith to stain,  
So to bring in wherewith to wash :  
And yet in washing one she washèd both.”

Eunice dropped from the Bach-like music of the words into a strain of solemn thinking ; somewhat of her past, more of the coming years

“ Wherein *she* thenceforth evermore  
With pensive humbleness would live and tread.”

She was beginning of late to feel that she *had* coming years of her own to live for, to be at peace in, to take real solid human comfort in, — the common comfort of common people ; perhaps just such content in living for life’s own sake, such consciousness of right to live and worth in living, as if she were but one of “ other people,” after all. As if indeed the pretty poetry

were but prose : " We always may be what we might have been."

Since the death of her child, great quiet, both from within and from without, had fallen upon her. In place of the anxious, uneasy moods of the half-hearted, disgraced young mother, a solemn thankfulness that the little thing was beyond their reach, and beyond the reach of the world which would deal by the child as it had dealt by her, filled and hushed her. The living child had dishonored her, — not so much in the eyes of the world, which was the smaller matter, as constantly and inevitably in her own. The little grave upon the purple hill, she felt, could not disgrace her. Her sense of bitterness and shame when (poor mother ! ) she said " my child " was settling into a kind of pleased expectancy because that holy thing, a dead baby, was hers to find, in some certain, happy time, " all over again," she said to Christina. In fact, in a healthy, honest way, with no attempted sentimental grief and regretting, Eunice was glad that her little boy had died. She never assumed that the matter was otherwise with her ; never affected a sorrow which she could not feel,

had never felt. It was well with the child. It was well with her. The Lord had remembered them both. Why make a feint of mourning?

This evident state of mind in Eunice caused some disapprobation in Gower. At least, Gower would have had her wear crape and cry at the funeral; though Gower owned that she had been seen on still evenings climbing the purple hill to little Kent's grave, "as bold as you please, and never cared for nobody that saw her go."

Yet, on the whole, the world — typified in Gower — was beginning to be not all unkind to Eunice Trent. Gower was no worse than other places. "This is not so much a wicked as a stupid world." Christianity was not, thirty years ago at least, "a failure." And this woman had lived so patient, brave, and pure a life! For all her past she had been so sorry! For a right to her future she had appealed with such persistent trustfulness in the force of the Lord Christ's example! Ever since disgrace had taken her prisoner, she had held up such pleading hands and such unspotted hands — to be "let out"! Honest men and women were beginning honestly to say, This is a good woman, after

all. There may be a place for her—even for her—among us. It is a very “unusual case.” She has had “peculiar advantages.” She has a claim to “uncommon charity.” She has evinced a “most penitent spirit.” Have you not observed her great “humility”? Shall we take her in?

“I am much surprised,” wrote Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle to friends in Gower, “to hear of the position which little Nixy Trent is acquiring among you. I was always much interested in the girl, and I am rejoiced to learn that any one with superior opportunities to mine has exerted a missionary work upon the poor young thing. Her case was so sad and depressing! You may be sure that your charitable spirit will be wisely expended and well rewarded.”

Eunice was thinking of this, wondering whether any other than the “charitable” amenities of society were likely ever to be offered to her, or were indeed due to her,—wondering idly, for she did not much care,—when some slight noise,—the cracking of plaster, the creaking of a door,—happening to strike her ear and her musing, recalled her suddenly to the idea that the house *was* rather “lonely—with Herbert—

of a winter's evening," and that she was ready for company, and Christina.

It was not, however, at all time for Christina, and Mrs. Purcell never got home early from the minister's. ("I wish the minister had more salary or fewer babies; mother will kill herself playing his nursery-maid," Christina used to say.) So Eunice, with the common longing of lonely people for light, — how many life-long sorrows have been cured in ten minutes by kerosene! — brightened Mrs. Purcell's astral-lamp; by which process she covered her finger with lard-oil, and so forgot whether she was lonely or not, and rose to rake the coals.

As she did this, an unusual noise fell upon her ear.

She laid down her poker, thinking that perhaps the servants, early home, were locked out at the back door, and stood, a lovely, listening figure, full in the centre of the rich uncurtained room; Margaret, for the sake of people "out in the cold," seldom draws her shades in the evening.

The sound was immediately repeated; it was just without the front window, and resembled the

noise which a step upon the crusted snow would make, though it was an irregular, uncertain noise, like that of a step in a place where a step had no business to be.

“Christina!”

Eunice called distinctly, but received no answer. Thinking still that Christina, perhaps in a freakish mood, was trying to look in or climb in through the low window, or that Bridget was drunk, and had mistaken the window for the back door, she crossed the room with composure to open it.

She lacked yet several feet of the window when she stopped.

Pressed close against the glass, and looking in, and looking at her, was the face of a man.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

IT was a rough face.

Eunice saw as much as that, though the man stood in the dark, and she in the lighted room. She saw more than that, when she had walked boldly and close to the window to get her hand upon the lock.

She had about the courage of an average sensible woman, — nothing more, perhaps. The average sensible objection to an evening visit from a burglar when one is alone in the house was strong within her, when she saw how rough a face it was with which she had to deal.

When she had reached the window, when her hand was upon the lock, when she would have drawn the shade, when she saw what face it was with which she had to deal, a terror quite unlike the average sensible fear struck her through, and struck her still.



She stood so still that her ugly visitor, taking courage, perhaps, drew close to her, with only the glass (Eunice thought, confusedly, how thin and shining and firm the glass was) between them, and rapped upon it with his knuckles, — the knuckles were very grimy.

“Well?” said the fellow, through the glass.

“Well,” said Eunice, in a dull, thick voice.

“Shall I come in, or ’ll you come out?”

Eunice sprang the lock sharply.

“Hush! I will come out.” She pointed, as she spoke, to the piazza door. The man — or boy, for he seemed to be scarcely more than a boy — nodded, and moved around the house, crunching the snow heavily underfoot. It seemed to Eunice’s excited fancy that the neighbors must hear him for half a mile away.

Eunice, instead of locking the piazza door, opened it, shut it after her, crossed the piazza, and stepped out upon the snow. The moon was up, and all the night was white. The young fellow, as he came around the corner of the house, was sharply relieved, both in face and figure, against the broad blue shield of snow.

He was ragged and dirty. A slouched, soiled

hat half covered very ill-kempt red hair, and nearly shaded his face from view. He jerked up his hat, however, partly in salutation, partly because it obscured his sight, as he came up to the spot where Eunice stood. His coat was out at the elbows ; his boots were out at the toes ; his hands, as I said, were grimy ; an odor of ill tobacco pervaded the air about him.

Eunice, standing with the full moonlight on her bare head, her fine lips parted, her eyes wide open, her slender, sick hands (Eunice always showed physical exhaustion first in her hands) folded and trembling, — Eunice saw, as the thief in Paradise might have seen himself dead upon his cross, — the father of her child.

Oddly enough, the only thing of which she thought, for the moment, was a theological discussion which the doctor and Mrs. Purcell had yesterday concerning the finer distinctions between retribution and discipline.

It did not occur to her, I think, that she had not deserved this ; she was a little puzzled as to the metaphysical grounds on which the Lord had decreed it.

The young man, who had been leaning against

one of the piazza pillars, waiting apparently for her to speak, and apparently somewhat ill at ease, broke the silence by saying, shortly, —

“Well, Nix !”

“What do you want of me, Dick ?” Eunice spoke with considerable self-command in her sweet, even, cultivated voice. Dick listened sharply to it, and something in it made him dully uncomfortable.

“Ain’t over-glad to see me, be ye, now? Did n’t mean no offence ! Thought mebbe ye would.”

“What do you want ?” repeated Eunice, in the same manner as before.

“Don’t know as I want nothin’,” said Dick, in a disappointed, embarrassed tone. “I thought mebbe as I had n’t done very well by ye, and, seein’ as I’m just about ready to live a decent life and settle down, I’d hunt ye up and marry ye ; but, by gracious, Nix !” — Dick looked across the white light between them with a puzzled face, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the wonderful southern skies, where the moon hung quite by itself, — “I’d as soon think of marryin’ *that* !”

"Yes, yes," said Eunice, mechanically, "just as soon."

"What with the white, and the shine of it, and the — the distance — miles of it, you know," mused Dick, "and the feeling that there warn't never a ladder in the world made high enough to reach the thing. Never should ha' known ye in the world, Nix, if 't had n't ben for hearin' of your name about town, and where ye was, and then for havin' the chance to make sure o't at my leisure through the winder-panes, — never should ! I've ben on the lookout for ye, too, this long while back. Come across old Lize once, with a blue panoraymy and Tim in tow, — tried to get it out of her whether she'd stumbled 'cross ye in her travels ; but the old woman shut me up quicker 'n gunpowder. I took the notion, at the time o't, as she knew. Where's the child, Nix ?"

The abruptness of the question startled Eunice ; she was shivering from the cold, which, in her unprotected state, was extreme ; and she was faint from the effort to speak gently to the fellow.

Dick was as good as other Thicket Street boys ; meant her no harm, — at least if he were not angered. Both her sense of charity and of

policy induced her to treat him with composure and kindness.

So, feeling very weak and very much confused, she staggered a little against the side of the house. Dick instinctively threw out his hands to keep her from falling. She thrust them away with a gesture of inexpressible loathing. She could not help it.

"I beg your pardon," said Dick, sullenly stepping back. "I see I'm not fit to stand talking here to a lady like you're grown to be. I'd better go, Nix."

"Yes, you had better go," said Eunice, recovering herself, — "you had better go, unless you wish to do me a very great harm, which I do not think you do, Dick."

"Meant no offence! No. Told you so!" interrupted Dick. "Meant no offence noway; Mebbe I'd better ha' let you alon' altogether; thought I was doin' the fair thing by ye, that's all. I ain't the good-for-nothing I was in old times; I thought I'd like to kind o' get you off my conscience, and spruce up and live like better folks, — besides, I liked you, Nix, first-rate!"

"But 't ain't no odds," continued Dick, after

a pause, — "'t ain't no odds about the child neither."

"I understand, I understand," Eunice answered, with increasing gentleness. "I know you don't mean to be a bad boy, Dick. I know you didn't mean to give me the — pain — you have given me to-night. But it can't be helped. God led me one way, you another. We are different, Dick, — don't you see? — different now, forever."

She spoke in a simple, motherly way, as if she were explaining something to a child. The young fellow received what she said with a perplexed and patient face.

"You're right enough on that. Wouldn't have come nigh ye if I'd known it afore as clear as I know it now. I thought a lady was a born-thing like, afore. But, for aught I see, you're as fine as any on 'em. I don't see through it," — Dick pulled his hat down over a pair of as dull, good-natured, uncomfortable eyes as ever attacked an old relentless problem, — "I don't see through it though! Here's you and here's me; grewed up in Thicket Street like 't other folks as grows up in Thicket Street; all of a piece both

on us ; if either on us stood a chance agin t' other, it was me by all odds (which hung about me while I was huntin' of ye up). Now, here's me, and here's you!" — Dick glanced across the shining breach, which all the lighted night seemed helping to widen between the two figures, typical as if Thorwaldsen had made a basso-relievo of them against the shining sky, — "here's you, and here's me! Good luck got you, — I won't say but you needed good luck, Nix, — and here ye be, and here, for aught I ken see, ye'll continer to be, and no ketchin' up with you in this world or t' other. Now if a fellar'd got his heart sot on ketchin' up, — which I won't deny I ain't so partikkelar 'bout, — and there, agin, why *ain't* I?" continued poor Dick, drowned in his own metaphysics. "When folks *are* sot on ketchin' up, and other folks are sot they won't be ketched up with, and the God as made 'em looks on and — and, as you might say, bets on the innings for the 240 creetur — Well! I don't mean no disrespect to him in especial," broke off Dick; "but I can't say as I see it. Howsomer, that's no concern o' yourn, and it's plain to see it would do ye no kindness to be seen

talkin' to me by neighbors and such. I 'll be more keerful how I put myself in your way another time. 'T ain't likely as ye 'll ever be so put about agin. But I meant to do the fair thing, if 't *was* late in the day," repeated Dick, as he turned to go.

Eunice, alive in the ears as a panther, — listening for neighbors, for passers, for Christina, for all the world to come and see her standing where and how she stood ; sick at heart, as one may suppose that only the pure who have struggled against tide for purity can ever be in tainted air, — found herself, after and above all, growing very sorry for Dick.

"Perhaps," she said, trembling very much, "you would like to know where — the little boy — is ?"

"Not unless you choose to tell," said Dick.

"Everybody knows," replied Eunice, simply. "Perhaps you would like to go and see it — over there." She pointed to the corner of the purple hill, where the light lay very solemnly.

"Dead — hey ?"

Dick stood, slouched and still, with his eyes turned toward the old churchyard and the climbing moon.



"Thankee," said he, after a pause; "mebbe I'll go over and make the little fellow a call. Don't s'pose I'm fit for 't, but I might be wuss, an' I guess no harm 'll come on 't. Good by, Nix; and I'll not grudge ye the luck, mind, in sight o' *that*."

Dick shuffled away, through the limpid light, up the purple hill, among the solemn snows where the baby lay, "ketching up" at last with the little grave, where Eunice thought she saw him, after a pause, kneel down and remove his slouched hat from his head.

She stood quietly enough till this, in the full light against the pillar; then all the world reeled.

She managed to crawl into the house. When Christina came home from the prayer-meeting, she found her on the parlor floor nearly senseless with what Dr. Burtis pronounced a clear case of neuralgia at the heart.

When they had left her — feigning sleep — alone in her gray room with her white cross that night, she got up, locked her door, and walked her narrow floor, with only intervals of respite, till morning, being, she afterwards said, "too

tired to lie still." Perhaps there never was a creature more thoroughly "tired" in brain and heart and body than Eunice Trent that night. The mere *solitude* of such an experience as hers must, it has often seemed to me, be the weariest thing in the world. Nothing exhausts like loneliness, and nothing equals the loneliness of sin, since nothing but the loneliness of sin is beyond the comprehending sympathies of Him who was "without sin among" us. In the bitterest of human pains, — remorse, — we must bear, as we incurred, alone. *He* indeed has agreed to "remember sins and iniquities no more forever"; but shall *we* — *can* we — forget? Perhaps there is in guilt a secret nature like the secret of perpetual motion: grasp the conditions, the result grasps you.

The thing which had happened to Eunice was as natural as the multiplication-table; indeed, she could but feel that Dick had let her off very easily. She wearied her excited fancy through the night by conceiving of advantages which he might have taken, of which she had read or heard as taken in cases similar to her own, which would have turned all her patiently ac-

quired peace a bitter thing till death. Whether of the Lord's mercy, or whether of the boy's good heart, she had escaped great perils with little hurt.

Suppose the neighbors had seen her standing there ; suppose the fellow had dogged her steps, wrung money from her, used her name lightly about the town, done any one of a dozen things which had been done in such circumstances many times before ?

She felt confident, quite, of his sincerity, when he agreed that she should not "be so put about agin." Thicket Street Nix had understood the boy well enough,—a good-hearted, careless fellow,—and Miss Trent felt little, if any, concern lest she were misinterpreting him now. In this, time proved her to be correct. From the moment when she turned and left him kneeling in the moonlight on the purple hill, Eunice never saw her child's father again. It took, I think, a little of the loathsomeness of the sight of him away, that she had seen him last just so and there,—changed her sense of individual suffering into a kind of solemn charity for poor Dick ; which, as time softened her memory of the whole

affair, she felt that she could "well afford" (as M. Jacques would say) to bestow on the miserable kneeling figure which was never to "ketch up."

Yet she passed, that night, hours of the kind which make old men and women out of young ones fast. The events of the evening appeared, she said afterwards to Margaret, "to have taken her up by the roots." She seems to have undergone a stirring, settling process, like fair water into which a filthy thing is thrown. Life in Thicket Street, sharp and gaudy and long as Lize's "panoraymy," unfurled all night before her; people, scenes, incidents, which she had for years forgotten, started up from the gray corners of her room, and stalked about her. Like the angel in Miss Ingelow's *Story of Doom*, she descended into hell with shining feet that floated, but did not touch the ground, — but it was hell.

She did not grow to feel herself to be aggrieved in this experience. The Lord could not help it. It was mathematics, not affliction.

But I remember once to have heard her say, long after, — some discussion; I have forgotten what, between Margaret and myself arousing the words, —

"Save a lost man his memory; he will need no 'eternal punishment' besides."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LITTLE DOCTOR.

“EUNICE!”  
“Christina!”

“I’ve done it!”

“What?”

“I — don’t — quite know.”

“What is it like, — ink on your wrappers, or grief to your squash-pies?”

“It is more like — getting engaged, I suppose,” said Christina, thoughtfully, closing Eunice’s door, which she had held half open, and sitting down upon the edge of the bed. Eunice laid down the pile of compositions which she was correcting, and repeated — in such a grave, peculiar way, so unlike the way in which almost any woman of her years would have said it — the word, —

“*Engaged* — to be married, you mean?”

“Engaged to be married, I suppose I mean.”

"I never should have thought of such a thing!" exclaimed Eunice, and she never would.

"Neither should I," pursued Christina, shaking her head very much as the doctor used to shake his over a discouraging patient; "I never should have thought of it in the world! I am sure I don't see why he did. But then he did, and it can't be helped, as I see."

"Whom are you going to marry?" asked Eunice, after a pause.

"Dyke Burtis, I suppose. Whom else should I marry?"

"Very true. There is nobody else."

Eunice made this remark with perfect gravity, and Christina received it as gravely, except that her eyes twinkled a little, that Eunice did not notice how grave they both were about it. However unusual a remark for one young woman to make to another, it was, nevertheless, an eminently sensible one.

Christina was about to do that extraordinary and humiliating thing — which only the lovely young women who do not get into the novels ever do — called "taking up with your first offer." And Christina, sitting there, all pink and

white except for the shine of her hair and the stars in her eyes, was a very lovely young woman indeed! She would have twinkled like her own eyes, shone like her own hair, in any society where chance had dropped her; was one of just those winsome, heartsome creatures who would set a man dreaming as sweetly and surely as scarlet poppies, — a girl that your young fellows would frame by their firesides forever (whether she knew it or not), as young fellows nowadays frame Miss Lunt's lovely lithographed "Future" to expend their spare sentiment upon. That picture, by the way, is a better portrait of Christina, as she was in the days of which I am writing, than any which the daguerreotyping art of twenty-five years ago could secure of her.

And yet, until Dr. Dyke Burtis that day, down in the parlor, had asked her, gravely and abruptly, as was the doctor's way, to marry him, Christina had never had a "love-affair." As Eunice said, there "was nobody else" in Gower to have a love-affair with.

"You love the doctor?" asked Eunice, slowly.

"As nearly as I can make out, I love the

doctor. He says I do. It seemed a great pity to contradict him. He knows a great deal more than I do. Now, I never should have known *that* in the world, if I had n't been told of it!"

"Your love him enough to go away with him — into his home?" continued Eunice.

"Considering mother has *you*, and he lives across the street — on the whole — yes, I think I should be a happier woman in Dr. Dyke Burtis's home than anywhere outside of it. If he did not live in Gower and across the street, I think I might — if it could not possibly be helped — go as far as Atlas with him," said Christina, with great gravity.

"This seems very strange!" mused Eunice. It did seem to her strange beyond speaking. She looked into Christina's straightforward, proud young eyes — they had grown very proud all in an hour! — till her own dimmed. The sacredness of that white thing, a happy woman's happy love, confused her like a new language. She did not know any words to use in speaking of it. It was something foreign, far, beyond seas of things, from her life. She did not understand



how to put out a finger's weight and touch the distant, glimmering thing:—

“A shadowy isle of Eden,  
Framed in purple spheres of sea.”

So, not knowing anything else to say, she said, after a long silence, only,—

“Kiss me, dear.”

She felt glad—a little more glad, it seemed, than she had ever felt before—that Christina was willing to kiss her.

She held the girl's face down and touched her ripe lips tremulously,—kissed her eyes, her hair, her forehead.

Christina winked.

“Are you anointing Aaron, Eunice?” she said.

Eunice felt that she would like to say something to the doctor, but knew neither what nor how. The next time that she saw him, she somewhat hesitatingly, and in silence, held out her hand. She did not feel sure that he would care to be “congratulated” by a Thicket Street charity patient, and that they both remembered Thicket Street just then was evident in the meeting eyes of both. Dyke Burtis esteemed

her, trusted her, but Dyke Burtis was a man, and one can never count on a man when it comes to the matter of "chesing hem a wif." It would not be unnatural if he should feel far more keenly than Christina that there was something incongruous, grating, in ever so slight an assumption on the part of a woman with such a history as Eunice Trent's that she — like any other woman — had right and fitness to step into the holy place where happiness like his abideth. She might take the shoes from off her feet, but that would rather reveal than conceal how scarred and wayworn the sad feet were.

So at least she thought, and so she felt greatly comforted when the little doctor, stopping only to stroke his streaked beard, — which he would have stopped to do if he were dying, — grasped her hand like a man who had got something now which he needed and had missed, — looked her for a moment full in the eyes with that peculiar deprecating reverence which newly happy people (of a certain kind) are apt to carry in the presence of a sad face, — coughed, and left her suddenly.

Eunice was comforted and surprised ; so little idea had she at that time, or indeed at any other

time, what a singularly consecrated, set-apart, sacred place she was taking in Margaret Purcell's household. She slipped, in her later years, into its purest joys, griefs, hopes, fears, plans, and purposes as quietly as the little nun in Miss Procter's legend, for whom Blessed Mary "kept the place" till she came back; none knowing, indeed, that she had ever gone away—to carry flowers every morning to the Virgin Mother at her altar.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE "METHODY TUNE."

SOME lives are like pond-lilies, — you think that you have gathered all the gold and snow of them, and when you go to look for your treasure, behold a little plain brown folded bud !

The story of Eunice Trent seems to close away from my touch in very much this shy, unornamented fashion ; veined and delicate, pearled and tinted, indeed, like the sheath of the sleeping lily, but, like that, a *suggestion* of color, a hint of wealth.

They were not the miracles, but the maxims, of Christianity which saved her ; and things befell her not miraculously, but in an ordinary, quiet manner, no more of interest to the romance-searcher than the Golden Rule. Her life was in most respects as uneventful as washing-day, especially in her latter years. It took you, and you it, quite as a matter of course. It

never startled you or met you at an unexpected corner. She "lived along," as we say, taught her school, took care of Margaret, made Christina's wedding clothes, had a class in Sunday school, watched with sick people, had what is called a "kind way about her," commanded the confidence, enforced the respect, due to a common virtuous woman's common virtuous life. When I have said this, I seem to have said a very simple thing, and Eunice Trent was capable of very complex things ; had certain heroic, stony elements in her which make women famous in pestilence, war, famine, which, had chance so befallen her, would have given to her history a tragic or triumphant chapter, in which he who runneth might have read her possibilities. But to those of us who knew and loved her, in the very simplicity of her patient and peculiar life the peculiarly patient victory of it lay. We who lifted the waxen eyelids and touched the golden crown of the dreaming flower knew them sweeter that they were shielded, and rarer for their drooping.

To have lived out her disgrace would have been a far more rapid process, if a kind of stake-

and-cross experience had given her opportunities of social martyrdom ; if that capacity of self-abnegation (marked in Eunice) which shames down shame itself in almost any history, but to which the consequences of a woman's sin yield last and hardest, had had outlets of noticeable, memorable action.

This, I think, she felt keenly at the time of a certain visit which she paid, of her own fancy, and alone, to Thicket Street.

This was immediately after she had, in accordance with the doctor's orders (which her increasing attacks of spasmodic pain at the heart rendered imperative), finally and reluctantly left her desk at school ; at which the Board had protested, and the children cried, to Margaret's complete content.

So, perhaps, she felt a more marked than usual vacancy of life and purpose on the shimmering sunny morning when she stepped into a sooty yellow omnibus in South Atlas, striking as near as she might by wheels for her old home.

"Thicket Street ? H—m—m," the driver peered at her through his little loop-hole with curious eyes. "Hain't made a mistake, have

ye? Thicket Street. H—m—m. Yes. Well. Don't go very nigh Thicket Street — *our* line don't. Let you off at the nighest p'int, since it's a Land of Liberty, — yes ; but it's not what you may call an over-pleasant place for a lady. Sure there's no mistake?"

"Quite sure," said Eunice, who — whether from the stentorian tones of the driver, or from his fierce black whiskers, grown inches since she saw them, which choked up the loop-hole and hung through like a feather duster when he tried to talk to her — had recognized No. 23.

23 did not, however, recognize in Eunice, in her careful black, the poor little tramp who had once stolen a night's lodging in his omnibus. "The best stuff aboard," he thought, making a driver's shrewd inventory of his passengers through the loop-hole.

Eunice had been but a few moments one of 23's passengers when 23 pulled up at a street corner for a little dumpy woman, with a little dumpy girl beside her, and a very little, very dumpy baby in her arms.

"Bundle in there, and be quick about it!" said 23.

The little woman, who did not seem as much offended as might have been expected of her at this somewhat free-and-easy manner of being addressed by your omnibus-driver, bundled in, and bundled the baby in, and bundled in the little girl, and when they had all bundled into a seat together Eunice saw that it was Marthy Ann.

"Got the young uns shod?" roared 23, through the loop-hole.

"Good gracious me, Dan! I'm not deaf, and there's no need of tellin' the passengers all as I went into town for," said Marthy, blushing as prettily as ever a little woman of her size blushed in the world. "Though I *did* buy the baby a pair of red ankle-ties, and, thinks says I, I'll give 'em to her to carry and keep her still, and what should she do but try to swallow 'em, and one of 'em sticking down her throat like to strangle her, and when I pulled it out, there it is, all turned violet in a streak across the toes, — the mischief!"

"Give her t' other," suggested 23. "Make her suck 'em both alike."

"I thought of that," said Marthy; "a violet foxing would n't be bad."



Marthy was so grave and pretty and happy about this bit of chatter, and she seemed, as she used to seem, so fond of her new baby, and so fond of her, that Eunice felt her heart warmed through by Marthy almost as much as had poor Nixy, listening to her lullaby on the kitchen lounge. She drew her veil and watched the children behind it; the little girl sat close beside her, and attracted by the whiteness of her hand, which lay, half gloved, upon her lap, she put up her little finger and felt it over shyly. Eunice raised the child's hand gently to her lips (wondering if such a happy little matron as Marthy would be quite willing that she should kiss her child), and slipped a tiny silver piece (as large as the hand would hold) into it, as she laid it back.

"Hush!" she whispered, "can you tell your mother something for me, if I ask you to?"

The child nodded, — a dumpy little nod, but emphatic.

"And not tell her — mind! — till I have got out of the omnibus?"

The little girl shook her head shrewdly.

"I want you then to tell her, — and you can have the silver, — I want you to tell your

mother, God bless her, and God bless the baby, and God bless you ! ”

“ How funny ! What for ? ”

“ Because your mother is a good woman — a good woman ; and once, long ago, she was kind to a poor little girl to whom nobody else was kind — but just your father there ; and so I want you to tell her, for it is easy for you to remember : God bless them, and God bless the baby, and God bless you ! ”

“ Might as well bless 'em in a heap, it would n't take so long,” said the little miss, with an economical air ; “ but I 'll 'member.”

Lest the young lady should not have “ 'membered,” and if, by any of those chance winds such as carry seeds to islands, 23 should ever see this page, he is hereby requested to deliver to Marthy the message left by the “ best stuff aboard ” on the sunny, shimmering morning when the baby added violet foxings to her scarlet shoes.

When 23 had dropped her, according to promise, at the “ nighest p'int ” to Thicket Street, Eunice veiled herself with care, feeling rather too weak and weary to meet the risk (if risk there

were) of random recognition in Thicket Street, than ashamed that Thicket Street should recognize her.

Her heart was full as she strolled up and down the miserable place. Its foul ditches, its dwarfs and cripples, its shrieking children, the shamed and drunken tip of the roofs, the concert-saloons, Jeb's, No. 19, the codfish on the wharves, the nauseated sunlight, the very chickweed in the chill triangular shadows, came into her vision dully, with at first no more than the familiar horror of a favorite nightmare. She very seldom afterwards made reference to the hour which she spent in the place, but I have understood that she said, shuddering, once to Margaret:—

"It looked just as I have seen it every night of my life since I came out of it, and just as I expect to see it every night till I die."

It was not until Jeb, casting accounts on his nails in his doorway, with a legion of ghostly handbills fluttering about his ponderous figure, touched his cap to her, and a ragged little Peters boy, some relative of poor Ann's (she knew him by the feeble, flexile family mouth), begged coppers of her, that she roused herself from her som-

nambulistic walk to what had been from the first her secret object in coming to Thicket Street, — the discovery of the whereabouts and belongings of old Monsieur Jacques.

But when she walked, paying little attention to her surroundings, dreamily through the guitar-shop door, she walked over, not Monsieur Jacques, but a mop with a little old Scotch woman at the end of it, who asked her shortly — I refer to the woman, not the mop — what was her business, if she pleased? and instructed her to gang awa' fra out the soapsuds an she had a care for sich dainty-shod feet as them she bro't wi' her, delayin' folks of a busy morn.

"I beg your pardon," said Eunice, stepping back; "but I came to find — can you tell me where I can find an old guitar-maker who — there are guitars about: perhaps he is here, ill? I should like, if I may, to go and see him."

"Gang awa'," said the Scotch woman, scrubbing the floor violently, and without looking up, — "gang awa' and welcoom, gin ye'll tell him the mess o' clearin' up he's made me. Look a' that for a job o' sweepin' — an' that — an' the dust all alang o' the instremeents, for a decent body to

be clearin' up for a deid tenant, as caed for water-gruel thro' a ten-day fever into the bargain !”

“Dead !” echoed Eunice.

“Deid,” repeated the old woman, nodding. “Deid just this day week, at nine o’ the nicht ; an’ mony ’s the time I ’ve warned him o’ the consequences, to a landlady o’ partikkularity, o’ refusin’ to dust the instremeents in case o’ sickness, pereel, or sudden death, — fra’ all o’ which, good Lor’, deliver us !”

“Dead — a week ago — poor old Jacques ! He used to be careful enough to dust his guitars,” said Eunice, sitting down upon a water-pail in the doorway (the only seat offering), which the Scotch woman had turned bottom upwards to dry, and taking a sad survey of the little guitar-shop ; old Jacques’s red wig stared emptily at her from a high shelf, — dusty, like the “instremeents” ; and a pair of torn pink kid gloves, likewise very dusty, lay upon a little cricket which Nixy used to fancy drawing to the old man’s feet when he sang of l’amour or l’Empereur, especially when he talked of “Rue Richelieu” or Dahlia. Beyond these and one old favorite fiddle, cracked

now and kicked under the counter, nothing in the little shop looked familiar to her; and the confusion of the landlady's pails and brooms gave a cold, unnatural air to the room, like a dead face dressed by hired hands. Eunice could not help thinking how gently Dahlia would have swept and dusted the dreary place, and how the "femme blanche" would have cried over the pink kids, and the red wig, and the cracked fiddle; what a lonesome dying the poor old man must have made of it, — "ten day of water-gruel" and the Scotch woman!

"He fell into drearsome ways," said the landlady, scrubbing up her words into a great many syllables, "afore he died, — moped and pined like; played nae music and sang nae sangs, an' allooted the dust to set and choke him, as ye see. It's *my* opinion," added the Scotch woman, solemnly, "that he choked to death — of dust — that's it; choked. Your doctors may talk o' fevers to me an they list; I've seen folks choked o' dust afore now, in judgment on their slovensome ways an' manners. *I've* seen it! I've got a bill o' the instremeents to pay me for my pains an' trouble alang o' the auld mon's undertakin' to be sick

an' dee upo' my han's ; an' sae ye ken they maun be cleaned up, worse luck to him !”

“Were you alone with him when he died ?” asked Eunice ; “and did he suffer long ? I will make it worth your while to stop and tell me all you can remember.”

“He suffered lang enow,” said the woman, lifting her eyes — and Eunice thought what hard eyes they were to be the last that old Jacques should see — for the first time, and taking a keen measure of her visitor's dress and manner. Having done this, she stopped scrubbing, wiped her hands, sat down on one of her brooms, and proceeded, — “suffered lang enow, an' bad enow, — pains in the head, legs, heart, pains here an' there an' allwhere's ; so he lies and shuts his eyes, an' once he caes for a bit Bible or Testament or prayer-buik like, I couldna quite mak' it out ; but there wasna one in the shop, sic a heathen was he ; an' when I offered out o' charitee to cover the kirk prayers o' my ain an' lend it till him for a space, if he wouldna hurt it, he shook his head decided, an' wouldna hear o't. As fast as he grew worse he took to singin' ; an' at the last, — at nine o' the clock this day nicht, in

a fearsome, still kind o' nicht, a' munelicht an' stars (it 's alway my luck to sit up wi' a corpse by munelicht, which is a bād sign — a bad sign!), — in a nicht a' mune an' stars, an' still, he sang as you mought hear him across the street, an' sang as he war bent on singin' o' himsel' to sleep like, — of which the noise was a great inconvenience; an' sae singin' an' playin' in the air wi' his fingers on guitars as nae mon but himsel' could see, he dropped off, plump! wi' the stroke o' nine."

"Could you understand what he sang? What were the words?" asked Eunice.

"Some o' his heathenish French jabber," answered the landlady, coldly. "I couldna mak' head nae tail o't, only o' the words as he dropped off wi', — an' them, I tak' it, was Methody, — 'Depths,' I made it, 'Depths o' mercy! Depths o' mercy!' o'er an' o'er, till it war like to ring in a body's head fore'er, — wi' his eyes quite open, an' them fingers playin' an' feelin' o'er the guitars as nae mon else could see nor feel. 'Depths o' mercy!' that war it; then follerin' after for a bit, —

'Can there be? — can there be?

Depths of mercy! — still —'



an' there, as I was a tellin' you, he dropped off at the stroke o' nine precise, an' I puts the prayer-buik (when I 'd covered it) aneath his chin, and I watches the corpse by munelicht, despite the luck, for there was naebody else to keep things decent, an' a' the nicht, though ye mayna believe it, *I* know as them guitars as nae livin' eye could see went soundin' an' singin' through the air, an' the tune they sang war the Methody tune ; an' doon in the shop — I 'd take my oath o't — doon in the shop, at twelve o' the nicht, I steppin' doon to see that all war well locked up, the guitars upo' the counter sounded there before my eyes, an' nae mortal hand to touch 'em, — an' they sounded a' the Methody tune at me, till I grew cauld to my shoes, an' I stood in the munelicht amid the awesome soundin', a wishin' that I hadna been aye too busy an' poor an' fretsome an' cross to hae treated the auld mon mair kindly like, for he *was* a peaceable auld mon, an' ne'er did harm to naebody."

The woman rubbed her cold eyes with a mop-end, — there were no tears in them ; tears seemed to have frozen out of them years ago, but they were full of a chilly kind of discomfort, — and

fell, upon that, briskly to scrubbing Nixy's little 'cricket, kicking away into the corner, as she did so, one of the dusty old pink gloves. Eunice picked it up and carried it away with her.

She had scarcely paid the Scotch woman for her trouble, and left the guitar-shop, and was making her way in haste, sick and sad at heart, up and out of the wretched street, when she came upon a miserable figure of a woman lying half in the gutter, half upon the filthy sidewalk, with her head upon her arm. Some children were using her as a target for apple-cores and pebbles; a drunken fellow, in passing, kicked her heavily out of his way. The woman lifted her head as Eunice went by, and Eunice stopped.

She hesitated for a moment, trembling and sick, wondering how and if she could touch her, then, suddenly stooping, laid her ungloved hand upon the woman's cheek in a very gentle manner.

"Moll! Poor Moll!"

Moll stared stupidly.

"Look up here; do you know me?—Nixy Trent?"

Moll crawled up a little from the gutter, and sat upon her heels, staring still.

"Nix! Who the devil made a lady of *you*?"

"God's folks," said Eunice, giving the first answer that occurred to her, in Nixy's old phrase, certain, at least, that Moll would understand it.

"God's folks indeed!" sneered Moll, most miserably; "I'd like to see God's folks, nor yet their Master, trouble themselves about *me*! I'm sick. Struck through the lungs. Consumption. See, don't ye?" — she held up her face, emaciated and livid till it was shocking to see, full in the pallid sunlight, — "I'm sick; and I'm dying, what's more. Can't crawl no further 'n the gutter now. Last week I could get up the street. It's all the comfort I get, — the sun on me. You'd never guess, if you died for it, how cold it is in the attic. Once a day I crawl down stairs — this way — on my hands. At night I crawl up. I'm dying like a dog, and starving too, — and damned besides. How many o' 'God's folks' do you know as would take me in and let me go to hell from their fine houses, — curse 'em! I tell you I'm dying!"

She fell down again weakly, and lay with her haggard face upon her arm, and her hair in the

"There are places. There are folks," said Eunice, earnestly, continuing to drop into Nixy's old, simple, trustful language. "I told you so, Moll, long ago. I tried it. I found them. If you want to die like a decent woman, I promise I'll find you a place to do it in."

"I'd like to die in a bed with a white cover to it—just washed," said Moll, slowly. "Don't know as I'm partikkelar about nothin' else. I'd as lieves do it one place as t' other. I'd go to a 'sylum or somewheres, if there was sun, and folks to get me there. Don't make no odds. I've heard they lay you out neat—in white shrouds—at the 'sylum. I want to die in something—clean," added Moll, trying to move a little out of the ditch. "This mud sticks to you so! And I've got nobody to bring me water. And the well's dirty, if I had. But it don't make no odds! Got to get used to going without water in t' other world, I take it. Will I be here day after to-morrow? Yes,—in the sun,—in the mud here,—if I ain't got to the thirsty place afore then; and thankee for your trouble, Nix. No, don't stop to get me water now—nor move me. I'd rather sleep. You'll draw a crowd if you

stop here. Good by, and good luck to ye! I'll watch for ye — if ye'll find a white spread — and the sun stays out so long. There! Go, and be quick about it!"

Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle had the control of a bed "with a white spread — just washed," in the hospital of the Magdalen Home, and Moll, at Mrs. Purcell's petition, went into it.

She lingered in it, in a stupid, dozing condition, for several weeks, paying little or no attention to nurse or doctor, visitor, chaplain, or trustee; but, waking suddenly one rainy morning, she asked for "Nix." It happened to be inspection-day, and Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle happened to be at the Home inspecting, and so it happened that "Nix" was identified and sent for.

"Shall I not read to you, or — pray — or perhaps sing a hymn?" Mrs. Myrtle, sitting down by Moll's bedside, asked, after the messenger had departed to bring Eunice. "She cannot get here before night, and if you were to grow worse, you know, and no religious assistance —"

"I'll hang on till Nix comes," interrupted Moll, wearily turning away her face.

"But if you are not prepared for the great change," urged Mrs. Myrtle, looking much distressed.

"Must run my chances," said Moll, doggedly. "I'm too sick to hear religion, — much obleeged to you. That dress of yourn rustles all kind o' through my head. Is that a prayer-book you've laid along down there on my feet? It's awful heavy to me."

The prayer-book was not heavier than Mrs. Myrtle's heart as she rustled, sighing, away.

"Religious effort among the masses," she sadly said to the chaplain of the institution, "is not, I am becoming convinced, at all my *forte*. I have no knack at it; I am no more apt in it than I should be in making bread. I find it extremely depressing!"

The chaplain (a modest man with a shrill voice) took off his spectacles, and shrilly said, —

"Make pin-cushions, ma'am!"

"*Pin*-cushions, my dear sir?"

"Pin-cushions," said the chaplain; but he modestly put on his spectacles, and modestly said no more.

It was, as Mrs. Myrtle had said that it would

be, quite night before Eunice, in the driving storm, reached the Home.

Moll, in her white bed, lay in a stupor ; had not spoken, they said, for more than an hour past ; her hand only gave signs of life ; it moved up and down feebly across the coverlet, pulling off imaginary specks and shreds, feeling, apparently, to see how "clean" it was. Eunice, after waiting for a time in silence, to see if she would not speak, roused her at last by saying, —

"You wanted me, Moll?"

"Nix? Yes. How wet you are!" Moll opened her sunken eyes. "It was a rainy night to come out in. And I only wanted you to ask you — if you don't mind — to let me take hold of your hand. There!" She took the hand which Eunice held out to her, and laid it up between her own, against her cheek, and, so lying, slept again.

"Was there nothing more, Moll?" asked Eunice presently.

"Nothing more," said Moll.

By and by she whispered a word or two, which Eunice, by careful listening, — the rain beat so upon the windows, — caught.

“Is there any of them — the folks — God’s folks you tell on — the other side?”

“The other side?”

“The other side of this which is going to happen to me, — the other side of layin’ here an’ dyin’. If I thought there was —” said Moll.

She broke off there, and neither spoke nor listened afterwards, except that once, Eunice, feeling a slight stirring of the cheek which lay against her hand, and bending her own down close upon it, heard, or seemed, or dreamed that she seemed to hear, the echo, the breath, the shade, of another whisper, —

“If I thought there was —”



## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE NINTH OF AUGUST.

THE 9th of August, 18—. Many people will remember the day as the occasion of the angriest and most destructive thunder-shower known, either in Atlas or in the region round about, for several years on either side of the date.

A few—residents of Gower, or friends of residents in Gower—will remember the day for those more especial reasons which induce me to bring it into the reader's notice.

Of these, I may plainly and at once specify Christina Purcell's marriage.

I object to closing so grave and old-fashioned a story as this with a wedding. And if it had not been the gravest and most old-fashioned of weddings, I am sure I should have forbidden the banns.

It *was* old-fashioned. No cards, no "recep-

tion," no satin nor shimmer nor shine, nor trails nor tears, nor faints, nor fans, nor chignons, — only Christina in white muslin, and the doctor in white kids, and the parlor in white flowers, and the minister and Margaret and Eunice and I to see. Christina would n't have had so much as the minister, if it had n't been decided best, "out of courtesy," to ask him. "Such a pity mother can't marry us!" she said.

The doctor had waited a good while for her, or she for him, or perhaps it was a little of both; what with Margaret's ill health, and the little doctor's slowly gained footing in his slow profession, and planning, and considering, and waiting till it was "quite best," as Margaret herself at last decided for them, they had been "promised," as the old folks in Gower called it, nearly four years when their wedding-day came.

The doctor was beginning to look old, — so much older than Christina that only the stars in the young wife's eyes saved Margaret at times from some persistent, unromantic, motherly fears for the permanency of her daughter's happiness, from wondering, as indeed she half hinted once

to Eunice, "whether, if Christina had lived anywhere else than in Gower, she would have loved and married somebody who would not be an old man before she was !"

"I suppose I cannot understand these things," said Eunice, with a certain reverence in her voice which moved Margaret much ; "but when I look into Christina's face, I always feel as if nobody in all the world, but just Dyke Burtis here, could have made her his wife to-day ; not if all the world had shown its best and manliest side to her, and not if all the world had tried to win her love. Is that romantic ?" she added, with a slight smile.

Perhaps it was, but it was very sweet romance to feel about one on one's wedding-day, and Eunice's sweet, still face shone full of it, — as Christina fully felt and well remembered, all day long.

And though it was a grave little wedding, — perhaps, indeed, could not be otherwise with just such a face as Eunice's there, — how could it be a sad one, with the shining face to light it ?

It was noticed, through the day, that Eunice

was somewhat more than commonly pale, and that, though she was busy, in and out, here and there, up and down, smiling much, that it was she who tied the flowers, who trimmed the rooms, who dressed and veiled and gloved and kissed Christina, and stopped her (so Christina says) on her way down stairs, to lead her into the gray room, and close the door, and fold her in her arms, and move her lips a little as if she would have spoken; yet, speaking not a word, unwound her arms, unlatched the door, and led her, by the hand all the way, down stairs, — that through all the day she was very silent.

The doctor came upon her once suddenly, in a corner of the piazza, where she had crept to be out of notice, and where, though Christina was calling her in a pretty little flurry about the tuberose, and though Margaret was wondering, in the hall, who was going to cut the cake, she sat with her back to the door, and her head dropped in a peculiar manner, which attracted his attention. As he drew near, he noticed that she unclasped her hands, which had been belted about her knees, as was her way when enduring

sharp pain, raised her bent body from over them, and made a motion like wringing them, which she checked when she saw him.

“ You are ill — worse ? ” he asked her.

“ It is nothing — nothing at all — no worse than — not much, at least — I am quite well now. Let me go. They seem to be calling me. Do not notice me to-day. They are all so happy ! Do not ! ”

She sprang up with her bright, white smile, and found the flowers, and cut the cake, and, as before, was in and out, and up and down, and here and there ; and either the doctor did not, in accordance with her wish, notice her again that day, or he forgot her. I presume he forgot her. One can pardon a man anything on his wedding-day.

It has been well remembered that Eunice on this day, for the first time for many years, removed her black dress. This was done at Christina's urgent wish. She had come into Eunice's room one night a little while before the wedding, after Eunice had gone to bed, and, “ taking advantage of the dark, or she never should have dared,” she said, had whispered, —

"You'll not wear black, dear, to marry me in?"

"What should I wear?" asked Eunice, after a pause. "Is it not proper?"

"Not," said Christina, with decision, "unless you will agree to wear white kids at my funeral."

Eunice smiled, but Christina, through the dark, could see how faintly.

"Well," she said, patiently, — "the day is yours. Anything you want, I suppose, if you won't ask —"

"White, Eunice. That is just what I must ask. I must see you, for once in my life, and for this once, in a white dress."

"All white?"

"All white, from head to foot, — as white as your face this minute looks through the dark."

Which was very white indeed.

"What will your mother say?" asked Eunice, after a pause.

"Mother? She proposed it! *Mother?*"

"Once I asked her — years ago — if I might wear a little white jacket like yours. She said no. But do not tell her that I remembered it."

Christina never did.

Eunice chose and wore a solid, soft, snowy merino, close at the throat and wrists, and hanging heavily to the floor ; an odd dress for a wedding, "but as perfect as the tea-roses," said Margaret.

I can remember well, that when she came down stairs, and slowly in among us, where we stood chattering and rehearsing, that there was not one of us who could speak ; that Margaret tried and failed ; that Christina tried, but only kissed her ; that Eunice ran her eye quickly from one to another, over us all, in doubt, or dread, or hesitation of some kind, which must have abated with the lifting of an eyelid ; but I cannot recall the features of her face, or their expression. Something about her dazzled me.

Christina was married in the afternoon, took tea with the rest of us at home, tied on her hat and walked off to the doctor's house a little after the setting of the sun. We made the plainest, homeliest, heartiest day of it that ever was made of a wedding-day. And we had the heartiest, sunniest kind of a day, — alight and warm to the very tips of the trembling leaves, and serene

to the brown lips of the earth. There was nothing at all — unless, perhaps, a little low haze in the west — that could have indicated or intimated the coming tempest. Though certain of the weather-wise were heard, indeed, when the storm had passed, to say that the sun set in an ill fashion, the like of which old experienced eyes had not witnessed for years.

However that may be, it was in a gorgeous fashion ; and we sat on the piazza, after tea, to watch it, chatting and hushing as the moods took us, and as the flush and frown of the sky allowed, — Christina and the doctor, like two children, at Margaret's feet ; Eunice, a little apart and alone, upon the piazza steps.

She sat quite in the light. The little hop-vine shadows tripped about her, peered over her shoulder, peeped into her eyes, stood on tiptoe over her soft hair, but held up their gray fingers and motioned each other back, and left not so much as a footmark on her.

"They don't dare," whispered Christina, "that dress shines so ! Why, see ! — the color ; where does the color come from ?"

As Christina spoke, the creamy surface of Eu-



nice's dress changed from white to gold, to pallid pink, to rose, to red, and, looking up, we saw that all the world lay bathed in redness. White lilies in the garden held up their faces for it. The purple hill, with its crown of graves, laid its cheek solemnly against it. The town, the church, the distance, took the tint, and all our little hop-shadows blushed. The low purple haze, grown solid and slaty, had just caught the ball of the sun, and there was something singular in the effect of such a mass of color of which we could not touch or see the source.

"It is like a prison on fire!" said the doctor.

"It makes me think of the calyx of a great flower," mused Christina.

"It is more like a drought than either," laughed Margaret.

"I don't altogether like it," continued Christina, shaking her head. "It is as solemn as the Book of Isaiah, and I don't understand it any better. It makes me feel as if I had been buried rather than married. Eunice! — look at Eunice; how still she sits!"

She sat indeed still, with her eyes turned away to the burning hills, so that we could not see them.

"Eunice, think aloud for us! Come! What do *you* make of such a sky as that, to come to-day, of all days in the year!"

"It is like," said Eunice, without turning her head, — "it is like the blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanseth from all sin."

She spoke under her breath, as one very much awed; and when Christina's chatter broke, and no one answered her, — perhaps because no one of us felt, just then, worthy, — she rose and walked away from us, through the tall ranks of garden lilies, through the gap in the little broken fence beyond, up the purple hill, and into the crown of graves, — drenched, as she went, in the redness:—

". . . . an awful sign and tender, sown on  
Earth and sky."

At the top of the hill, where she stopped, she seemed to plunge into it, and she stood, or seemed to stand, quite still, until the scarlet sea rippled in paling waves away, and the dusk set in, and we could see her white dress only, very dimly, through the gloom of the brooding storm.

Margaret waited for her upon the piazza after the rest of us had gone away; and Eunice, coming wearily up the steps, crept in her old way to her feet, and laid her head upon her lap.

"So they have left us," said Margaret, gently stroking her hair, "all to ourselves, to finish life, Eunice."

"To finish life," repeated Eunice. "Yes. I wish —"

"What do you wish?"

"An old fancy. You talked me out of it at the time. I suppose it is impossible. But I suppose I shall always want to go back."

"You mean the Thicket Street plan?"

This was a "fancy" which Margaret had with difficulty, "talked her out of" at the time when poor Moll Manners dared the risk of finding God's folks upon the other side of her clean white death-bed at the Home.

"Yes. I could not go without you. We could not, I suppose, either of us, have gone without Christina. But now that she is in her own home with her own work, and now that you and I have none —"

"What would you do in Thicket Street?" asked Margaret, thoughtfully.

"Save souls!" said Eunice.

Over this blunt, old-fashioned, orthodox answer, Margaret mused a little in silence.

"There would be peculiar difficulties, peculiar annoyances for you in ever so successful a missionary life in Thicket Street. Have you considered that?"

"O yes! quite considered all of that."

"You would find it no obstacle?"

"No obstacle. Perhaps altogether the reverse of an obstacle. I should like to pass along into some other hands, before I die, a little part of all that I have borrowed from you,—the long-suffering and the patience, the trust and tenderness; the doing what no other woman that I ever knew would do; the courage and the watching and the praying and persistence which," said Eunice, with much emotion, "would save the world if the world were Thicket Street!"

"Hush, dear!" Margaret kissed the words off from her lips, and, feeling how cold they were, and how they trembled with the excitement of the day, bade her talk no longer, and said that

they would consider what she had been saying at another time.

She watched Eunice climb the stairs with her little lamp in her hand, thinking how feebly she walked, and following the slip and bend of her thin fingers upon the balusters. On the landing she stopped, and, shading her eyes a little with her hand, looked smiling down, started, Margaret afterwards thought, to speak, but said nothing, and, still smiling, shut the gray-room door. A fold of her heavy white dress fell out and caught in the latching. She opened the door, drew it in, and shut the door again.

The great tempest of the 9th, perhaps, had been slowly building the sky over with black bulwarks for several hours, but it sprang fire upon Gower with great suddenness a little before midnight. Half the signs in the town went down. A steeple fell, and another tottered. Railings, roofings, fences, door-posts, showered all the air, and the stoutest trees in the old town fell, before Gower had time to take off its nightcap and look out of the window. All of this any "old inhabitant" will tell you as well as I.

Most of this Margaret and I, roused by a fearful crash and yet more fearful glare in our very ears and eyes, confusedly saw or felt, while we were more particularly conscious that the huge elm in front of the house had fallen, and lay — scathed, smoking, torn — prone across the gardenful of white lilies, and hard by the windows of the gray room.

“I don’t know but we are all going to perish here! This is horrible!” cried Margaret, groping for her matches. “Do let us die in the light, at least, and together. Eunice! How dark it grows! Eunice, Eunice! She does not hear. We must get to her, or she to us. Hear that!”

As she spoke, such a shock struck the house as made her stagger where she stood in the middle of the room, and the match in her hand went out. She struck another, — it flashed and darkened; another, every match in the room, — every match in the room went out; and it was as blue and ghostly and ugly a sight as ever I saw.

Margaret threw down her match-box, and groped her way, with an exclamation of horror, through the dark to the gray room.

“Eunice—” she pushed open the door; but when Eunice made no answer, she stopped and called me, and we went both of us in together.

When the storm was over, and the stars out, and the lighted house grown still, we could see how quietly she lay, —not struck by the storm, as we had thought, but sunk in her soft white dress, as she had fallen hours ago, at the foot of the great wooden cross, and with her arms around it.

THE END











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